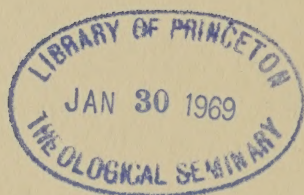


# Postmodernism

BELL



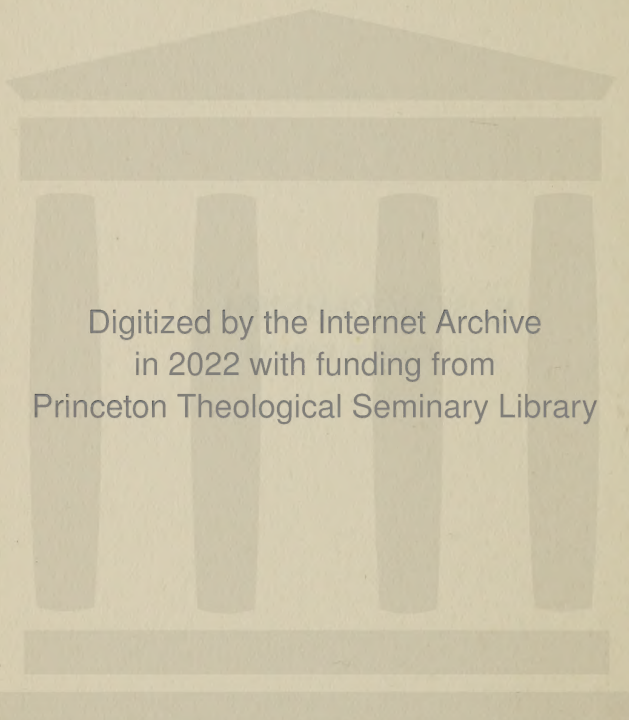
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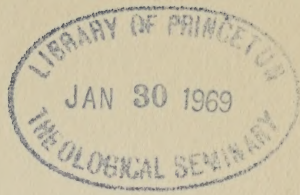




**POSTMODERNISM**  
**AND OTHER ESSAYS**



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# POSTMODERNISM

## AND OTHER ESSAYS

BY

BERNARD IDDINGS BELL, D.D.

PRESIDENT OF SAINT STEPHEN'S COLLEGE

Author of "Right and Wrong after the War" and "The Good News."

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TO HALEY FISKE



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## PREFACE

THE essay which forms the major part of this little volume was written because in the course of my lecturing on religion in St. Stephen's College and in other institutions of higher learning I have found that it has been necessary to deal with the problems involved and that useful books on the subject are rare. The point of view taken is common enough wherever thinking people meet together. It is as yet largely an unexpressed point of view, which manifests itself chiefly in resentment against the absurdities of "Fundamentalism" and the sentimentalities of "Modernism." At the same time it is quite generally recognized that the time has come for positive statement about and constructive approach to some such really modern religious attitude.

I made the major thesis of this essay into a sermon during the academic year 1924-1925 and preached it at Wellesley, Amherst, Williams, Columbia, the University of Illinois, St. Stephen's, and my own Alma Mater, the University of Chi-

cago. In all of these places it aroused much interest, considerable later correspondence, and valuable advice, chiefly from scientists who were teachers in these institutions. There was a large demand that the thesis should be amplified and published. I wish particularly to thank my scientific colleagues at St. Stephen's College for their general interest and their many valuable suggestions. I also thank the students in the religious survey course at that college, who listened patiently to the ideas advanced when yet they were somewhat inchoate and who, by their most intelligent questioning, helped me to bring those ideas into something approaching order.

As for the other essays in the book, it may be well to say a word. The one about The Moral Revolt of the Younger Generation was delivered two years ago in Baltimore as a paper at a Church Congress. The article on Religion in Colleges originally appeared in *The Living Church*. This is also true of the more or less casual remarks about the relationship between Victorian ethics and contemporary religion. The Church and the Young Man and Religion and Civilization appeared first in *The Atlantic Monthly*. To the editors of both of these papers, for permission to reprint, I am grateful.

Finally I must acknowledge here the graceful hospitality of two Italian hotels, the Grand, at

Portifino-kulm, and the Villa Sorbelloni, at Bellagio, where this book was finally prepared for publication.

BERNARD IDDINGS BELL.

*Annandale-on-Hudson,  
Michaelmas, 1925.*





## **I. POSTMODERNISM**



## 1. HOW MODERNISM WENT HALF WAY AND STOPPED

PROBABLY the chief difficulty of the day, when one comes to discuss religion, is that most of us are unable to accept without question the spiritual authority of our immediate predecessors. We do not care to sit at the feet of our fathers and grandfathers. We have serious doubts as to their entire dependability. Nineteenth century Anglo-Saxon Christianity was almost wholly the child of the Reformation; and that movement seems to many of us to exist only historically. We feel that, whatever else may be uncertain, it is at least sure that we have moved forever away from and beyond the sixteenth century.

The Reformation was based upon two beliefs: one, in the infallibility of the Bible; the other, in the sufficiency of the individual intellect. Given the inerrant book and the individual competent to understand the book, there easily followed a sure method both of finding God and of ordering the moral life. The problem of authority was solved.

Upon these sure foundations our fathers could, and did, confidently take their stand and set out upon spiritual adventure.

For some little time now we, or those of us at least who are informed, have been forced to abandon the first of these beliefs. The Bible can no longer be regarded as an inerrant touchstone, the wholly infallible gift of the Eternal to struggling man. For this reason Protestantism, in any sense that would have been acceptable to Luther, or Calvin, or Wesley, or Moody, is a collapsed, or at least a collapsing system. In every so-called Protestant communion there are, to be sure, those who wage a determined fight for the traditional sanction; but it is a losing fight. The fact that many Protestant bodies continue officially to use the old nomenclature is of no significance save as it serves to confuse people. Most of the ministers and an increasing proportion of the lay folk accept conventional phrases about scripture inspiration and the absolute authority of the Bible, but read into the words new meanings. They are, commonly, quite willing to admit that their real beliefs about the holy writings differ largely from those of their predecessors.

Whether this free and easy way of using words is right or not, at least it is sure that their changed convictions are a necessity. Competent modern criticism has shown the Bible to be, not a unified



and magical book, but rather the great literature of a religious people; fascinating and deeply infused with spirituality but fallible as all human writings are fallible; often crudely ignorant of scientific facts and principles; in many cases redacted for political or priestly purposes; containing deep truths, seen by great prophets, imbedded frequently in baser settings; a book which, after fair and discriminating study, yields much true gold; passages of which are among the noblest writings of the race; having as its climax the compelling story of One who claimed to be God and was, withal, a simple and brave gentleman. A noble library is this Bible, as it comes to us from the analysis of modern scholarship; but it is no infallible record, written by the moving hand of God, safely to be appealed to as a sole and wholly adequate authority *per se* on which to build one's life and one's search for Deity. We can no longer say, "God made man out of dust and breathed into him a soul. We know it, because the Bible says so. When good people die, they live in a great celestial city. Thus it stands written. Jesus created a Church, with a government of bishops, priests, and deacons to run it. We are sure of this because these officers are mentioned in the record." Such a simple way of proving things will no longer do. We cannot even with confidence maintain that Jesus is the incarnate Son of God *merely* because the writ-

ings tell us so. If we are to know it, there must be other and corroborative evidence.

All of this has long been known to educated people, particularly those whose specialty is theological and Biblical study. It is with a certain dazed amazement that scholarly people have discovered, from the agitations of the last two or three years, that there are still people who seriously maintain the old theories about the Scriptures. Trained scholars have long supposed that everyone knew, what evidently he does not yet know, that Biblical criticism won its battle before ever this present century saw light. There is not a competent Biblical critic today who will seriously maintain that the Bible may properly be regarded in the way that Cotton Mather regarded it, or John Knox, or Samuel Wilberforce, or Alexander Campbell. In most countries even the man in the street knows that. Only in America is Biblical "fundamentalism," so-called, undiscredited. The Protestant world, despite the late hysterical utterances of persons who seem to prefer prejudice to thought and study, has definitely abandoned its primary tenet, and has moved on into what is properly called Liberalism and more often, inaccurately, Modernism.

This may be a position in which men can and will rest. It may be merely a temporary stopping-place from which further movement is necessary.

Before one considers this latter possibility, however, two things need to be recognized. First, be Liberalism good or bad, permanent or temporary, there can be no going back from it to old-fashioned Protestantism. Knowledge and intellectual honesty prevent that. Second, since it is in these nineteen-twenties the prevalent position of the churches which once were Protestant, one must try to understand what the position really is.

When one attempts to analyze Liberalism one is at once in difficulty because of a common haziness of thought and speech by which it is popularly confounded with Modernism. Modernism is, properly, a way of looking at religion which originated with Loisy and Tyrrell, two eminent and deposed Roman Catholic priests. Briefly their contention was that, while the facts of Christian theology were possibly, even probably, not literally true, still one ought to express belief in them because they represent certain valuable elements in life and have certain good effects upon those who assert them. It was a way of saying that although things probably are not so it would have been helpful if they had been so. Of course this is a very crude summary of their thoughtful and subtle books, but it fairly well represents their position. The Roman pontiff deposed these men and put their writings upon the Index because he felt—and surely most people will agree with him—that it was intellectually impos-

sible to assert as facts what one felt merely to be symbols. If they were symbols and nothing more, it was the part of simple honesty to say so. That, speaking carefully, was and still is Modernism. It had and has nothing whatever to do with theories of Biblical inspiration. The apparently permanent confusion of Liberalism with Modernism in the popular mind leads to the most absurd mistakes. Doctor Manning, the Episcopal Bishop of New York, for instance, is frequently referred to in the press as a Fundamentalist, because he is opposed to Modernism, and the deduction made that he believes in the literal infallibility of the Scriptures. As a matter of fact he, in common with every bishop of the Episcopal Church in America, is as far as possible from being a Fundamentalist in his attitude toward the Bible. It ought to be clearly recognized that there are many people today who say the Nicene Creed and mean it and believe it, not symbolically, but as a statement of facts, who nevertheless know and state that the Bible is what we have just said scholars have found it to be.

There are, to be sure, many catch-phrase people who rejoice in having their Liberalism called Modernism and who insist that it must be the last word in religious wisdom because it is modern, up-to-date. It does not really impress thinking men to be told that a way of looking at things spiritual must be right because it is contemporary. Industrial im-



perialism is modern, too, very modern indeed, but quite a few of us think it destructive of what in life is decently human; Bolshevism is still more modern, but surely that does not make it more noble and more adequate than the Cecil-Rhodesism which it seeks to supplant. Modernity is no criterion of political truth. It is equally an untrustworthy element in determining religious truth. Nothing which purports to deal with everlasting reality and fundamental human experience can afford to be dated. The abandonment of the sanction of an infallible religious volume is not to be advocated because it is modern, but because it is critically and scientifically a proved necessity.

But every religious system, including Liberalism (and from now on, since we understand what it is and is not, we shall submit to the terminology of the mob and call it Modernism), must be based upon some assumption or other in which men can put their trust. Since the Modernist has no infallible Bible, to what can he turn, to what does he turn, as a basis of authority? He has still one faith, usually as yet undisturbed. Protestantism, as we have said, had two, faith in the infallible book, and faith in the competence of the individual intellect. The Modernist has lost the former of these, but not the latter. He still puts his trust in the sufficiency of his own mind.\*

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\* I am well aware that there are some who call them-

The theory of Protestantism was that men are feeble creatures, unable to find God except God teach them by a book. Once they had the book they were quite clever enough to understand it and to proceed toward activity, and thought, and spiritual aspiration; but they had to have the book. They could not figure things out for themselves without it. Modernism would have it that men need no infallible direction of any sort, that they are capable rationally of discovering, by reasoning based upon scientific investigation, both what they are, their nature, their destiny, and also what the secret back of things is, what God is. We have nothing to lean back upon. We must and may safely rely upon ourselves.

There is great nobility in this faith of the Modernist. It is a high concept, this of man freed from priestcraft, independent of shibboleths, needing no revelation, not relying upon any ancient writings, master of his own soul, captain of his own fate, calm and dispassionate, unswerved by prejudice, fearlessly thinking his way toward that perfect Truth which is God. As long as men believe it is a true or possible picture of man, Modernism will seem a compelling solution of the religious prob-

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selves Modernists who are not intellectualists but mystics. They are exceptions to the rule. Moreover, they are restless in Modernist company. They are Postmodernists, at least in the making. It remains true that Modernism is definitely anti-mystical and rationalistic.

lem. But once let you, and me, and the man around the corner begin to suspect that, freed at last to think and by thinking arrive at Truth, human beings are congenitally incapable of doing any such thing, and Modernism will become as interesting an antiquarian curiosity as Calvinism is now. And that that is exactly what is happening is apparent to anyone at all in touch with contemporary thought, especially scientific thought. Modernism was, perhaps, modern at the turn of the century, pregnant with possibility as a religious method. That it remains so today no alert person can seriously maintain. Most of the leaders of Modernism are well past middle age. To the brainier youths it offers little attraction. It is a commonplace to note that scientific thinkers have no more use for Modernism than they have for orthodox Protestantism. This is because in 1926 the Thinker is seen to be not the mythological figure of the Modernist, the young man upon the hill-top, head bravely lifted toward the stars, expectant of the Truth; but rather, as Rodin has carved him, sitting and bent, wrestling with fact, his head upon his hand, puzzled, seeking but never finding, disillusioned, almost at the gate of despair. To the Thinker happy, optimistic Modernism seems a quintessence of outgrown sentimentalisms. If there is meaning to be found, and any peace, if there be a God, the man of today must achieve them otherwise.

## 2. HOW WE TURNED TO SCIENCE FOR THE TRUTH

THERE is only one essential difference between man and the rest of living things. That is his incessant search for Truth, accompanied by an insistent belief that somehow he can find it. The other animals know nothing of such endeavor. The cow, the fly, the elephant and the rest are apparently quite satisfied if they can sufficiently accommodate themselves to their environment to insure food and shelter and opportunity to procreate their kind. Man, however, may have access to all these animal satisfactions and still remain anything but happy, or even contented. In him there is another urgent hunger, the hunger to know why. What is the world all about, what is the meaning of himself and his fellows, what is human destiny? To the consideration of these vital problems he is impelled by some inner necessity which will not be denied.

It is this philosophical hunger which is the parent of all things peculiarly human. We have been

told for a long time now, by many of the intelligentsia, that our civilization is economically determined. That theory is at once wise and extremely silly. It is quite true that the particular form in which human endeavor manifests itself is determined by economic factors, but it is not these factors which produce the endeavor. Even though man must, of necessity, give most of his time to grubbing for food and shelter, it is not there that his imagination is focussed, nor there that his heart is fixed. Always subconsciously, and frequently consciously, he is seeking the meaning of things. His achievements are very largely by-products of that search. He will know the Truth, for until he does know it he is enslaved and knows no peace. This seeking shows itself within and behind all human artistry. Never was written a poem worth the reading that does not echo this quest for meaning. All great music throbs with its urgency. There is no art for art's sake. All art exists for the sake of Truth, poignantly desired, elusively compelling. The artist may call it Beauty but, as Keats said a century ago, Truth and Beauty are names for the same thing. At the end of the rainbow lies the pot of gold. Always somewhere ahead, glimpsed in high moments but never quite perceived, lies Heaven. Now we see as in a reflecting mirror, darkly, what some day we must see face to face; and every artist knows it well. The beautiful, the



worth-while, all that is not beastly in our achievement, is a by-product of this essentially human longing for the reason why.

As the ages go on, once in a while men awake, shocked and startled, to a realization that Truth cannot be discovered any longer by the technic prevalent in their particular day and, since new technics are painful to acquire, they give up the struggle. "Away," they say, "with all this unending and hopeless searching. We can never know. Our methods are ridiculously futile. Life must remain an inscrutable mystery. Let us abandon the task. Let us, like beasts a little more clever, accommodate ourselves to the things that are tangible. Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die." And they do eat and drink; but they are not merry. Rather their lives are filled with sadness. Those are the gloomy, the tragic, the ghastly periods in human history. But those times never last. Man is incurably a philosopher. The children of those who cease searching insist upon resuming the search. A new technic is somehow devised and the age-old quest again begins.

Today we are in the midst, or rather, we are entering into the midst, of one of those ages of disillusionment and surrender. We of the twentieth century are rapidly realizing that our technic for the discovery of Truth, the scientific and rational technic that has been current for a century and a

half, is inadequate. We are waking to the knowledge that, wonderful as are the mechanical and technical by-products of that method, marvelous as is the store of particular facts which it has added to the treasury of human knowledge, it has told us nothing and apparently can tell us nothing about the things which we really need to know: about Truth and Beauty, and the why of things, and the destiny of our own lives. As we discover that the technic is inadequate we enter into a period of dazed hopelessness.

It must have been great fun to live, especially in France, in the latter years of the eighteenth century, when first the thrilling conviction took hold of modern men that they could *think* their way toward essential Truth; when, like apostles of a new religion, the intelligentsia cried out, with passion, that men were reasoning beings, and believed that in these words they had adequately described the race. "Let us, therefore, observe accurately, and from our data reason clearly. That is the path to what we long to know. All else is waste of time." So their cry arose, and men believed them. Rapidly and surely their dogma spread through old Europe and into young America. It came to be the basic conviction back of the whole nineteenth century. No one can understand the nineteen-hundreds, especially the latter half of it, unless he knows that back of its statecraft, its so-

cial theories, its art, its literature, its philosophical speculation, was the firm belief that if we know enough facts and think hard enough about them we can discover the reason for living and the way to live and thus populate the world with good and happy persons.

The natural result was an almost unprecedented growth in human conceit. Humility came to be so absurd that it was rarely thought of and pride dropped from its place as the deadliest of the seven sins to a negligible position as scarcely wrong at all. How astonishing was the nineteenth century! One contemplates with wonder the eminent Victorians; the Parisians of the Second Empire; the secularist giants, fanatics who insisted upon their complete rationality, who made possible a united Italy; the solemn German philosophers of the eighties and nineties; the imperialistic madmen of the end of the century who read Kipling, rejoiced in bearing the white man's burden, gobbled up what markets they could, and drenched South Africa in needless blood. How could people have believed in themselves as these people believed in themselves? Was their sense of humor wholly atrophied? They laughed, it is true, for men must ever laugh at something, at what they deemed grotesque and ridiculous. They laughed at many of the things which the race has instinctively held sacred; but with rare exceptions—whom they

scorned, as, for example, Samuel Butler—they almost never laughed at themselves.

Why should they? Were they not makers of, and participants in, what they deemed a golden age? They could not see, as we see, that it was really a grim, grey, iron age. They believed themselves the heirs to, and the vast improvers upon, the ages that had been. Gladly, confidently, they forged ahead upon their rational and practical investigations. They found out many things, some of them important things, a few of them tremendous things. They believed that soon and without doubt they or their children would know everything, or at least everything worth knowing. The day of reason was come and its sun could never set. On the race would go, until by reason man really knew.\* The key was the rational, the scientific method. They believed in it. They made it the beginning and the ending of education. They devoted their children to it with fervent hope. It was for them the final, the inevitable technic.

As their most valued assumption, this was bequeathed to the Twentieth Century. When, a score of years ago, I set out upon my undergraduate career, almost without exception the men who taught us and sought intellectually to influence us,

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\* One finds this Spencerian conviction still in the pseudo-scientific and pedagogical romances of that late survival of Victorianism, Mr. H. G. Wells. Even Mr. George Bernard Shaw is only beginning to outgrow it.

simply assumed without argument that the method was wholly adequate. If, occasionally, some daring young instructor presumed to doubt it, pressure was brought to bear sufficient to suppress him. No one wishes to appear a silly ass.

Of course, with such a conviction as this central in thought, religion had to go by the board. In my student days, although I attended a great university controlled by a Protestant denomination, a university ostensibly founded on a religious basis, religion was, for the most part, ignored as a thing of no intellectual value. Very few of the professors attacked it or even sneered at it. Public opinion was still strong enough then to keep sceptical pedagogs from too open utterance. But that religion must contribute toward the acquiring of knowledge, that it even *might* be of service in approaching Truth, that it was a key to the treasury of Reality, apparently never occurred to the faculty, at least to those who taught me, and I was from time to time under some of the most eminent men who lectured there. Thus it was wherever the more thinking people congregated. One was supposed to find out Truth merely by clear reasoning from accurately observed phenomena. How could religion be of any real importance? Despite the best efforts of those who seek to minimize the supernatural in religion, certainly it does deal with the unobservable.



"We know nothing which we cannot scientifically prove, or rationally and intellectually explain." That was the current wisdom. One cannot rationally prove anything about God. One cannot scientifically demonstrate even that there is any God.

In the face of that realization a few of us, hardy and dogmatic souls, became atheists and mechanists. Some of us, more shy, sought to dodge the issue and to hold to ancient forms of theological words which we carefully denatured of their original meanings. Most of us became frankly agnostics, and let it go at that. Maybe there was a God and maybe there was not. Why bother? The scientific method would lead us into all Truth.

I have no doubt that the majority of ordinary people think so still. The man in the street is always a couple of decades behind the man in the study. Mr. Babbitt's modern thought was really modern about 1895. When I was a lad it was only by the leading minds that religion was regarded as negligible. Ordinary people still went to church and said their prayers. Indifference is now spread more widely. It is not that the citizen of Main Street has anything against religion. In fact he patronizes it *ad nauseum*, as he does music and as his wife does literature. He and his family simply

think of religion as a minor decorative art. For their realities they look to science.

But meanwhile the man in the cloister of learning has been changing his mind.



### 3. HOW THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD HAS LIMITATIONS

**T**HE scientist is now of the opinion that the scientific technic is not, in itself, sufficient.

During the past twenty years knowledge has grown and scientific methods have been improved with greater rapidity than in any single generation since history began. Modern thought of the nineteen-twenties is, in consequence, vastly different in many vital respects from scientific thought in the eighteen-nineties. The chief of these differences can be expressed, possibly, with sufficient clearness when it is said that, while in 1895 practically every first-rate scientist assumed that man is capable by observation and reason of discovering essential Truth about the universe and about himself—assumed it without much thought and because he was engrossed in methodology—there is not a mind of premier rank in the world in 1925 which believes any such thing. The scientific intelligentsia now realizes, and for the most part freely admits, that, merely by scientific methods, nothing

of basic importance, of primary importance, of ontological importance, can be discovered.

To the man in the street such a statement sounds bizarre, grotesque, absurd. It seems to him that he knows better. Does he not see for himself the marvels of science? Beneath the waters move ships; aeroplanes soar overhead; he listens in at the radio; his motor cars are powerful and cheap; he trusts, poor fool, for national defence to high explosives and poisonous gases; he visits electrical plants and beholds how the lightning is harnessed both for great tasks and for menial services; when he is ill he is helped, and when he is well he is kept well, by super-modern medicine where germs are made to destroy germs and poisonous injections prevent poison; he is told, truly, that almost every civilized product has been touched by the chemist. "If," he says, "scientists can do all these marvelous things, and many others equally thrilling, it stands to reason that there must be in the halls of science men of superlative wisdom, men who truly know, men who can show us how to live and why. To these scientific supermen we may safely entrust ourselves and our children, our lives, our social structure, our education, our arts, and our philosophy. No longer need we leave such matters to mere priests and prophets and cultural intuitionists. Here are true geniuses. They know, where others merely guess."

But, alas, in the halls of science there are no such persons. Daily more and more people are finding it out. Moreover, the better scientific minds are increasingly of the opinion that there never can be any such persons. Man does not, scientifically, know very much. He knows a vast deal more than his fathers knew; but beside what he does not know and can never by experiment discover, what he has been able to learn is next to nothing. There are only three questions recognized by scientists as legitimately characteristic of science: "What is it?" "What does it do?" "How does it do it?" *With the reason for things, scientific workers are not concerned.* That lies beyond the frontiers of physical law, beyond the necessarily self-imposed limitations of science. There are even many scientists sufficiently humble to recognize that the question, "What is it?" may possibly lead beyond those limitations. Every time such a query is answered there arises a new one: "What, in turn, is that?" The more we arrive at definitions the more does ultimate definition recede. Eventually we see that the final answer to "What?" inevitably involves "Why?" Most scientific workers tacitly admit, therefore, that all their work is done and must be done under great limitation. Working thus they can and do know many and important things; but, in the last analysis, *they never know what anything ultimately is.*

To say this is not in the least to attack scientists or to disparage science. It is the leading scientists themselves who are saying it, such men as Bertrand Russell, and Milliken, and J. Arthur Thompson, for instance, in lectures, articles, and printed volumes. They are distressed to realize that the common folk are expecting from them, on a basis of scientific surety, leadership in ethics, in philosophy, in social and political endeavor—leadership which they cannot in honesty pretend to be able to furnish. They freely and frequently say that science does not make its followers know, nearly as much as it makes them realize their ignorance. It is a rare thing to find a contemporary scientist of reputation who is conceited. It is only the little, routine grubbers, the young bachelors of science who do hack work which the greater scientists may use, whom one ever hears postulating omniscience for their guild. There comes, there must come, to scientists a basic agnosticism more devastating than any agnosticism of the nineties. Then men doubted that they ever really could know God. Now they doubt that they ever really can know anything at all.

The scientist gazes, for example, into the heavens, through instruments the power and intricacy of which would fill with wonder the astronomers of a century ago and which make the little telescope with which Galileo shocked his contem-

poraries seem a baby's plaything. Worlds on worlds we know something about which our fathers neither knew nor suspected. We measure their distances and their relative sizes; we weigh them; we even discover their constituent chemical elements. There they float—in what? In the ether. And what is ether? It is matter which has no density, no weight, none of the properties of matter. It is this non-material matter which fills limitless space. As a matter of fact, when we say that, we really mean that we do not know what fills space. About the primary mystery of space itself we know not one whit more than our fathers knew. What is it? Why is it? Nobody has any certain information. As far as anyone can now see, no human mind can ever acquire information about it. And what is time, the complement of space? We are told that probably our planet is about eight billion years old. That is one of the late guesses. Eight billion years is quite a while, but what is such a period in comparison with apparently endless ages before and endless ages yet to come? And in the terms of these maddening things, time and space, what is this little earth, on which we set up our devices and gaze into the night? There is no scientific answer; none whatever. Before limitless bigness the human intellect faces a dilemma; it may surrender or it may crack; it does not, cannot comprehend.

We turn from such considerations with a sense



of hopeful relief to the study of matter in the small. "Atoms, molecules, positive and negative electrons"—we talk much about them. But what really are they? An atom would seem to be a unit of matter marvelously tiny. Within each atom there are, first, outer electrons and, second, inner electrons, all whirling in ellipses. The former take part in ordinary chemical reactions, such as combustion; their movements determine the "chemical qualities" of the elements. When the latter, the inner ones, are disturbed, we have radio-activity. When electrons pass from an inner ellipse to an outer one, according to some very late investigators, we have light. All of that is interesting, but even more interesting is the thought of those reaches of space in which in each atom, the electrons, separated by relatively gigantic distances, are moving at their tremendous speeds. The inner electrons in the nucleus or inmost center of the atom are of the order of  $10^{-6}$  mm apart, or about 30,000,000 times their diameter. One-thirty-millionth of the atom is electron. The rest is space. In the outer portions of the atom they are even more widely separated.\* This seemingly solid paper, the apparently solid mountain on the top of which I pen these words, are alike as porous as a sponge, and much more so. Every atom of these seemingly static and stable

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\* Based on figures in Walker's *Introduction to Physical Chemistry*.

things is a little universe, itself filled with vast reaches of "ether" and all whirling at dizzying speeds. Even every breath of air is made up of microscopic solar systems, which nonchalantly I inhale and exhale, like a god. Infinite Lilliput is no less disconcerting than infinite Brobdingnag.

At the heart of matter is, then, what? We ask the physical chemist and he replies that he is not sure but that probably everything that is is really energy. We inquire further what that means, exactly, and if he is honest—and most physicists and chemists are almost painfully honest—he tells us that it really is a way of saying that he gives it up. What matter is is at present, and probably will remain for the future, a thing beyond the comprehension of the race. Limitlessness, whether of largeness or of smallness, is incomprehensible.

And what is man, thus poised precariously between the greater and the lesser mysteries? We ask the biologist first. He tells us plainly that man is an animal. Possibly some of us feel inclined to quarrel with that definition as tending unduly to simplify the problem; but, even if we are willing to take him at his word, the answer is not very simple after all. What is an animal? He says that an animal is an organism, i.e., a particle or a combination of particles of living substance capable, under proper conditions, of preserving and sustaining itself. But we are compelled to ask still



another question. What, precisely, is meant by living substance? What is life? If our biologist is accurate and scientific—and most of them try to be both—he frankly admits that he does not know what life is.

We then turn to the sociologist, not without certain protests on the part of other scientists that sociology is not truly a science at all. We ask him what man is. Man, he replies, is essentially a social being. But, we rejoin, terms must be defined. We can never understand what a social being is until we have some idea of what a being is. To answer that, says the sociologist, with commendable modesty, is not the province of his department.

It is with a breath-taking realization that physics, and chemistry, and astronomy, and biology, the older science, and even sociology, if it be a science, cannot answer the riddle of life, that many of the better informed and therefore more disillusioned common folk have turned hopefully to psychology. Since we cannot learn our destiny from the study of nature, inanimate and animate, or from the study of social phenomena, we may find a clew in the examination of man's mental processes. Therefore we, also, turn to the psychologist with our insistent question. Sir, what is man?

Unless he be a very new-fashioned behaviorist indeed, he answers that, whatever more man may or may not be, at least he is a self-conscious being.

Of course that throws him back at once upon the problem of what is consciousness. If our psychologist is scientific—and most of them would rather perish than even to appear to be anything else—he will admit that nobody can define consciousness. He probably has his own theory, but it is only a theory, no more and no less valuable than the guess of any other man. If, however, the psychologist is a behaviorist, he will pour good-natured scorn upon our question and insist that it matters not at all what man is, as long as one can observe the fascinating things man does. In other words, he tells us that our quest is hopeless, which is precisely what we cannot admit without surrender.

Nor is the psychologist content to stop there. He further proceeds to take from us what little still remains of our intellectual self-respect. He bids us understand that the human brain, the sole instrument we have wherewith to record impressions and to reason from them, is but a fallible and most unreliable instrument. Our senses continually play us false. We are great fools if we wholly believe what we seem to see, and hear, and touch, and taste, and smell. He shows us, too, with evidence hard to dodge and plausibility difficult to resist, that man is hardly the reasoning being we have been wont to suppose; that, whereas we think we reason out our conduct and our convictions, as a matter of fact for once that we do this we are moved, and

our actions and convictions determined by, emotions, prejudices, reflexes from external stimulations, inherited warps, and inhibitions of all sorts. He smiles as he informs us that one of our chief mental activities is persuading ourselves that we have reasoned out things which have arisen not at all from reason. In short, he insists, calmly but devastatingly, that mere reason is not necessarily an adequate guide to Truth at all. What would Voltaire have said if he had been told that?

As a matter of fact, science has revealed to man nothing about what are time, or space, or life, or consciousness, or matter itself, much less about what is man and what is his destiny. This ought to be faced clearly, as clearly as the leaders of science themselves are facing it. The only possible end of the scientific method, unless that method be augmented extra-scientifically, is honest and complete agnosticism about everything and frank surrender in man's age-old battle toward Truth and toward a meaning for the universe and himself within it. We pride ourselves upon our great sincerity. Indeed we are sincere, to an extraordinary degree. Consequently, by leaps and bounds our generation is reaching this stone wall. No wonder we are restless, unhappy, distrait.

#### 4. HOW OUR SITUATION IS NOT WITHOUT PRECEDENT

**F**ACE to face with the *impasse* of which we have been speaking, the first reaction of a sensible man is to say, "What of it? Let us drop this ridiculous problem of what and why and busy ourselves with life's concrete and specific tasks. Surely there is enough to be done. If we employ ourselves with sufficient activity we shall not find ourselves hopelessly unhappy. We shall somehow muddle along." That is what our generation, apart from occasional men of thought, offers as its solution, usually subconscious, to the problem before us. Surely therein lies our greatest danger of the moment, that we shall become a race of frantic muddlers, intensely busy going somewhere, never mind where, tripping one another up, finding the turmoil in the end futile and even ridiculous. Purposeless bustle is the parent of banal mediocrity. Already we are at once an imitative and a leaderless people, easy victims of crowd psychology, standardized not merely in our ideas but in such fascinatingly human

things as dress, and manners, and speech, a generation when men seek the easy and the popular way and few dare walk alone. In the arts, in statecraft, in education, in what passes for philosophy, this is true. How can it be else? Who will pioneer if there can be found no sure approach to Truth? Who cares to blaze new trails if all trails lead alike to nowhere? If we can never know what we are or why we are, how is leadership possible? Who dares lead anybody anywhere if no one may first be sure?

The inevitable result of this agnosticism about everything cannot help but be moral cowardice, spiritual surrender, and racial paralysis. We approach rapidly the place occupied by a cynic of long-ago, whose question, "What is Truth?" seems at first glance merely an abstract inquiry. It sounded academic enough, but it resulted in a ghastly crime—on Golgotha. As gradually the conviction that man can scientifically discover nothing of his ultimate destiny sinks into the until now hopeful human mind—and day by day more people come to understand that fact—what impotence of character, what ghastly drabness in moral purpose, what deadly and hopeless dulness creeps upon us.

What a modern man was Pontius Pilate! He deserves our sympathy and today ought easily to get it. He might be wrong. Who knew? He did not.

How could the poor man, thus uncertain, stand against crowd madness? He was a creature of his age. How much like our own day was that era of the old world into which Christ came, we do not enough understand. Ferrero and other modern historians have shown us political and economic parallels between Augustan civilization and ours; but the philosophical parallel is even more striking.

Imperial Rome was the spiritual child of two cultures, Greek and Italian. The Greeks were a people distinguished for many things, but chiefly for this, that they sought for Truth upon an intellectual, a rational basis. Early in their development they discarded religion, relegated the gods to the limbo of interesting protagonists of human ideas and, like our immediate forefathers, although without their equipment for scientific observation, attempted to reduce life to rational formulae. And, even as we have found out, so they at length discovered that this cannot adequately be done. Their attempt was tragically ineffective. They were serious about it, with an almost deadly seriousness. Their ancestral supernaturalism, as we have said, they soon abandoned. They were, in the time when their culture flowered, in no sense pagan. They had no religion at all, or were as near to that atheistic state as any people ever has been in history.

Exactly to the extent that this became true



of them, they also lost their sense of joy. They ceased to get fun out of living. They were a serious and a sad people. It is interesting to note how lacking was their sense of humor. They wrote magnificent epics in which nobody laughs, except when drunk, or smiles, save for purposes of seduction. They made play into a system of ethical culture, with a deadly seriousness not equalled even by that eminent Victorian, Dr. Arnold. They composed tremendous tragedies, full of beautiful despair and lovely hopelessness; and satires and extravaganzas redolent with caustic wit; but they seem to have written no comedies worth preserving. Their architecture has a cold finality about it that speaks of pride and death rather than of vibrant humanity. Even today it is recognized by the sure instinct of the people as appropriate for cemeteries. It had no note of growth in it. Can one imagine a more deadly motto than their favorite, "Nothing in excess?" Like all people who think instead of feel, they had little or no compunction about the rightness of building up a culture for themselves on the shoulders of their sweating slaves. Like all people who have belittled love of woman, they were largely addicted to horrid and unnatural vices. In short, the Greeks were certainly the most intellectual people in all history, and, with almost equal certainty, the most dull.

They could think. For sheer rationality neither

Plato nor Aristotle has been equalled since their day. For a long time these Hellenes tremendously impressed the world by their calm assumption that they could solve human problems by a rationality which was the ancient equivalent of what we call the scientific method; but they never did so solve them. Socrates foretold the decay of that glory which was Greece when, after a moment of cosmic doubt, he informed his friends that he was assuredly the wisest man in Athens because no one there really knew anything and he alone knew that. A troublesome fellow was this Socrates! he had most upsetting ideas. He drank the hemlock; and Greece went on. The ancient world, even the Greek world, at length came around to his opinion. It woke from its dream of purely rational adequacy. Men grew weary of philosophy and hopeless of results from thought; and the center of culture moved inevitably from Athens, the seat of thinking, to Rome, the city of action.

"Away with all this pother about Truth," said not merely Pilate but Rome itself. The Eternal City took over, greedily, without ever understanding its real meaning, Greek civilization as it stood: philosophy, aesthetics, art, poetic formulae, even its sad vestigial remnants of a religion. She made excellent, machine-tooled imitations of the things which once in Greece had been spontaneous. Then she devoted her time and effort to the prac-

tical task of building an empire. Nobody seems to have stopped to ask why there should be an empire. Almost no one attempted to make any sense of imperialism. Everybody hid from theory as much as possible. Rome had its grandmotherly philosophers and moralists, to be sure, its Ciceros, and Senecas, and the rest, but it rendered them about the same honor and respect that the average American business man gives nowadays to professors of pure, as distinct from applied, knowledge. They were respectable to have about, but the real job lay in imperial service. It was the day of the man who gets things done.

By our Lord's time this hurly-burly had gone on until it, too, was beginning to seem more than a bit of a bore. Civilization appeared to many a load almost past bearing. Men were, to use a modern parallel, "fed up with the white man's burden." Imperial patriotism was a thing more of compulsion and of habit than of the heart. People were realizing more and more that, if thinking was no way to get at ultimate reality, neither was mere doing things. The bustle was losing its narcotic effect. Not only the Greek technic but also the Roman technic had been tried and found wanting. That world which was the residuum of both was wearied, hopeless, cynical. It had gone far on the path which men pursue whenever they abandon the search for reality. It gorged and guzzled and

otherwise indulged itself carnally, in an effort to hide from the insoluble. And these substitutes were rapidly growing, as they always do grow, tasteless and insufficient.

Into this deadly dull era of imperial pomposity, organized bustle, collapsing imitation philosophy, and bored humanity came Christianity out of Syria in the hands of the Apostles and particularly of Saint Paul. Within a few short generations it permeated and captured the civilized world.

At first thought it seems astonishing that the sophisticated, over-organized, *blasé* Roman world should thus rapidly have surrendered to what must have struck it as a crudely simple faith, a religion which had originated in one of the least esteemed of its provinces. To account for this remarkable capitulation many explanations have been offered. Some have said that its pure and lofty moral ideals attracted a sensual people. That explanation is popular with those who estimate Christianity as an ethical rather than a religious movement, who look on Christ not as one who claimed to be God, but merely as an admirable and gentle moralist. One has only to study into the facts of the early centuries a little, however, to discover that, considered merely as an ethics, Christianity could ill have competed with the older, more urbane, and altogether delightful teachings of Stoicism or Epi-

cureanism. Beside them it must have seemed crude and badly formulated. Also, when the conversion had been accomplished we see a Christianity in which worship and message alike are far from being primarily ethical. It was as a religion that it won its way. Lately there have been those who have insisted that Christianity owed its early progress to its revolutionary, working-class bias. No explanation could be more grotesque. It is true that its earliest converts were persons of little or no social position. It is true that certain sects of early Christianity sought to make of their religion the sanction for revolutionary activity. It is, however, rather difficult to find evidence that the orthodox Christian message was more than incidentally concerned with economic principles. Certainly Pauline Christianity, which, whatever be its merits, happens to be the Christianity that actually did the converting in question, contained nothing of a class-conscious or socially inflammatory nature. Even he does write that there are few of position among the early converts but, on the other hand, he always preferred to work with people of more than ordinary education, and he rejoiced to state that there were beginning to be those even of the Emperor's household who had embraced his faith. The hypothesis of a working-class Church will not hold water. It is true that many of the early fathers denounce the holding of wealth and



dilate upon the wickedness of the wealthy; but candid examination of their utterances would seem to show that, far from being desirous of more widely distributing that wealth among the larger masses of the workers—in the fashion of modern radicals—they felt that its possession by anyone was incompatible with an undivided search for contact with God. Such a position may be argued against with some justice, on the ground that no social order at all is possible upon a basis of universal scorn for the things of this world; but it is not possible to maintain that men who held this notion were working-class economic agitators. It is also true that various Emperors persecuted the new religion because of its revolutionary character; but again a little investigation will show that its revolutionary message was one of non-participation in imperial projects rather than one of economic upset.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the real reason why Christianity spread rapidly among all classes, rich and poor, masters and slaves, the real reason why it captured the world, was that it gave to a people who had despaired of getting anywhere by either rationalism or imperialism a seemingly workable method for the pursuit of Truth. Men grasped this new technic with eagerness. They found that it gave to them renewed hope and joy. Into what had been darkness, to use an image com-



mon to both St. Paul and St. John, there shone a light.

Our own age is, as has been said, extraordinarily like that of Augustan Rome. We have had three assumed goods, in the attainment of which our immediate fathers sought for meaning in living. They pursued these ends with confidence and hope. We still pursue them, without much of either, more because of inertia than because we really esteem them worth the struggle. Our civilization is a web in which the warp is Reason and the woof a twist of Activity and Comfort. Some of us esteem the warp more highly; some, the woof. There are those who, despite what the modern world knows of the limitations of the modern method and the fallibility of the human brain, still have their fanatical over-belief in the sufficiency of Reason. Others, more numerous perhaps, have scorned the dim precincts of the study for the busier world of industry, finance, imperial endeavor. They still hope to find by sheer activity what life is all about, to taste it and to find it good. Greater still, and every year more great, is the number of those who carry-on, slaving in the building up of industry, the promotion of commerce, the seeking of imperial markets, the organizing of everything upon which organizing hands may be laid, with no marked hope that the whole hullabaloo called civilization either means or can mean anything.

They find it easier to swim with the current than to resist it.

Then there are those who, having despaired of both thought and activity, have for satisfaction in life become frank hedonists, living daintily or beastly as their taste may dictate, given over to the creed of ease. "Blessed are the comfortable," is their sole beatitude. This is at the present moment a growing cult among our younger people. For it some people damn them, as though their hedonism was not the result of having lost their faith in the older half-gods still worshipped, with questionable wisdom, by their fault-finding elders. But worse than damning youth for what it is, is the failure, on the part of middle-aged sentimentalists, to perceive about the younger generation what are the simple facts. That our colleges and the other haunts of youth are filled with starry-eyed young idealists is grotesquely untrue. It is no kindness to youth to tell lies about it, even benevolent lies. Modern higher education, for instance, is largely what youth demands it to be, devoted to the notion that the end and aim of learning and thinking and working is to produce padding for the human race. By accumulating some of this padding men and women can shield themselves from too much reality. They can comfortably labor a little, comfortably mate, have not too many—and increasingly fewer—comfortable little children

(watched over by comfortable nursemaids and comfortable pedagogs), live in comfortable houses, dress in comfortable garments, belong to comfortable clubs, enjoy comfortable holidays, pass into comfortable old age and sink at last into comfortable, water-tight, upholstered graves. Like it or not, that is the impression of life's realities which prevails on college campuses, at least in America. Almost the only pedagogical question which the average student, unaided by outside suggestion, ever thinks of asking about his own training is this, "What does this course or that buy me?"

The hopeful thing—what some people call the dangerous thing—is that there is among young people a small but growing group which rejects this philosophy not merely as ignoble but as idiotic. That man's destiny is merely Sybaritic seems to them the nonsense that the race, during the ages, actually has found it to be. They are in revolt. Some of them used to think that they were in revolt merely against contemporary economics. They took out their resentment in damning modern society. From soapboxes they shouted their message to the working-classes, who did not know whether to laugh or to get angry. Every college had its socialist club, whose idealist members would have made Karl Marx foam with wrath. Now they, for the most part, have come to see that their resentment runs deeper and extends more widely. They

are in revolt against the complacency, the smugness, the mere carnality of contemporary life. They are demanding that honesty be more highly evaluated than efficiency, truth more highly than materialistic shibboleths. But the fact that they scorn the way of Main Street does not mean that they themselves have anything to offer as a substitute. They have no notion of what is right; they know merely that almost everything that is seems wrong. Like the somewhat older group led by Messrs. Mencken, Nathan, and the like, they are healthy and hope-inspiring but they have not moved from the cry of revolt to the demand for reconstruction. They insist that man was not made to be the unhappy, timid, and inglorious creature which the twentieth century has left him. These restless youths are the hope of the world. They will not much longer be content with mere negations. As in numbers and intensity of feeling they grow greater they will, before many years have passed, hit upon some positive solution to life's problem. Most of them think it will be, when it comes, a brand-new solution. They are mostly, like all young people, too preoccupied in themselves to see mankind in the perspective of history. They do not see that often a rediscovery is the most revolutionary sort of discovery. At any rate, day by day, there are more of them thinking, even though at present they are but a tiny leaven

in the mass of youthful complacency; and day by day they see a little more clearly that man's ancient pursuit, his inevitable inquisition, is the quest for Truth. He must know why.

Even as Christianity offered a new technic in the days of Rome, so it may be again. Christianity can do nothing whatever in a day when men believe in their own intellectual sufficiency. It could do next to nothing for the nineteenth century. In this later era, now that we know, or at least are rapidly learning, that rationally we can arrive Nowhere, now that we perceive that the great gods, Reason, and Activity, and Comfort, all have feet of clay, now that we know not whither to turn to find the way out of a hurly-burly bore, Christianity may do much. It may do everything. But that it may do anything, it is necessary that we perceive, at least a little, what the Christian technic really is.

## 5. HOW GOD BECAME COMPREHENSIBLE

CHRISTIANITY is a religion based upon agnosticism. No one has ever been able to be an intelligent Christian until he has become an agnostic first. It is a faith for men who think all they can but who nevertheless are intellectually humble, which is only another way of saying that it is a faith for people with common sense and a sense of humor. Except in the highly artificial atmosphere of super-civilizations man knows quite well that he does not really understand the basic things. In fact he instinctively rejoices in the mystery of reality. He is naturally a poet. Poetry is more basic in him than is pedantry. The sense of mystery is the only really common sense. Nowadays the greatest scientists are, quite as often as not, the greatest mystics; the highest knowledge goes with the most humble heart. Men are again agnostics. Once more Christianity can come into its own. It makes no attempt to explain the unexplainable or, as the negro pastor said, "to unscrew the inscrutable." It seeks sufficient knowledge by another path.



Its first postulate is that personality is as real as matter or thought; and that, in consequence, the technic of finding out reality involves not merely activity and reason but also love; that Truth is not merely a syllogism to be mastered but also a Person to be adored.

So ignorant are we today of the concepts of religion that there are actually those who seem to think that when Christians say that God, or Ultimate Reality, is a Person, they mean that somewhere he has a localized habitat in space and even that He is enclosed in a material body, with hands and feet and so forth, such as we possess. What is really meant by personality is, of course, self-conscious existence. One needs no demonstration, indeed one can have none, of that concept without acceptance of which all other concepts are impossible, namely that one is one's self a person in the sense mentioned; that apart from and possessing one's body there is the reality of one's own being. Christianity states without fear of contradiction that human personality is not only the most important thing about one, but the only basically important thing. Everybody knows, without proof, when he thinks about it, that that person which is himself can do three great and important things. He can act through the agency of his body; he can think and reason, with the assistance of his brain; and he can love other persons. Christianity

insists that this last function of personality is quite as basic as either of the others and that the fullness of personal existence is impossible without the exercise of it. Christ went so far as to say that love is man's chief activity; that his whole duty is summed up in loving; that to love God with all the heart, and soul, and strength, and mind is the first great commandment and that the second great commandment, to love one's neighbor, is the necessary implication of the first. It is important to note that to Christ loving, while it involves mental activity and bodily activity, also involves something independent of these; that it is also a thing of the heart and soul. It has its non-material, non-intellectual elements. Love is not primarily physical, although it may enlist the most intimate physical contacts as means of expression. Nor is it primarily rational. One's love for one's sweetheart or one's father is certainly not the result of reason, nor does one persuade one's self by syllogism to care about one's child. One loves; then one reasons about it and gives it expression. The love itself is a deeper thing. One's personality realizes and values the existence of some other personality. Christianity's first truth is, then, that we are persons. This we have, to an astonishing degree, forgotten. What strange definitions one hears of humanity. "Man is a tool-wielding animal." "Man is the creature of his environment." "Man is an animal

which cooks its food." "Man is a rational being." All are true definitions and all are ridiculously inadequate. The only perfect definition is that man is a person who can love.

To attain to knowledge, therefore, about the realities of life, man must love. This is true even in the acquiring of knowledge about human beings. If I am to understand my age, my world, I must have more than a knowledge of the facts involved. I must sense personalities. Not alone with weighing machine and measuring rod, with chemical analysis and genetic tables and psychiatric test, is humanity to be understood. I cannot know men and women until to some extent at least I have fallen in love with men and women, experienced them as mystically akin to me and found them as beautiful and as absurd, as ridiculous and as tragical, as mirth-provoking and as tear-compelling as I am myself. Nothing can be really known about them, individually or collectively, until love has revealed it.

Christianity further maintains that essential Truth, ultimate Reality, God, the Secret of Things, the Everlasting Why, is also a Person, a self-conscious Being, not merely a syllogism or a rationalization; and that as such He is to be discovered, not merely by investigating Him and reasoning about Him, but first of all by loving Him and being loved by Him. Religion is the art of dis-

covering, through love, Him who is back of and through and behind all things. It is a way toward Truth. It does not consist in intellectual speculations, although one can reason about religion once one has experienced it. Nor is it merely a code of conduct, although certain standards of living are bound to result from it. It has a philosophy and it has an ethic; but it itself is neither. The former is an attempt to express realities otherwise discovered and the latter is the outcome of the discovery. Religion is a matter of personal contacts between God and men.

To be sure not merely Christianity, but every other religion as well, involves attempts to bring about such personal contacts. The word religion means that which binds together the unseen Being and ourselves. If that had been all there was to Christianity, if it had been merely what the Arians tried to make it and what Unitarians still would have it, it would have met in the Graeco-Roman World only the mental reaction which such religion meets today. Men would have said then as they say now, "Even admitting the contention that Truth is personal, we find little to help us in your system. How can we, who are persons imprisoned within the limitations of time and space, establish such contacts as shall constitute love with a Person utterly free from those restrictions, One who must be, if He is at all, Omnipotent, and

Omniscient, and Omnipresent. To find Truth, if that is what Truth is, we should have to escape completely from the flesh. From the Orient," they would have continued, "before you there have come mystics, taught by Zoroaster or in the lore of the Buddha, telling us that we must and can so escape from the flesh. They teach that only by some sort of self-hypnosis which removes us from the world of sense can we find Reality; that, in some strange ways, we can get out of the world of three dimensions into the world of four. Possibly there may be some few exceptional people who can do this; but we cannot. Indeed, compelled by strong instinct, we will not try to do so. The effort seems too pregnant with possible disaster to our sanity. We cannot get to your Personal God, even if we admit that He is and that He is personal. There is no help in this sort of thing. If you have no answer to this difficulty, we shall not listen either long or patiently."

In the answer which Christianity made, and still makes, to this entirely proper and sensible plea lay, and still lies, its unique message to the world, its ancient, present, and everlasting appeal.

It said, "All that you say of the difference between the Person of God and the persons of men is true. He is unlimited. He is incomprehensible. It is also true that we cannot escape from time and space and live as gods. We see in part; we under-



stand in part. We cannot find Him. But there is another alternative. He can find us. If you were God and wished to give your love to men and to be loved by them, and they could not live or think or love in that realm not of time or space which was your essential habitat, what would you do? You would of necessity limit yourself, place yourself within the realm of time and space, not cease to be your limitless self and yet live also as they live. You would remain God and yet become man. They could not reach you but you could and would reach them. That we declare God has done. Within the realm of time and space came God incarnate, in all points tried and limited as we are, yet perfect God all the while. In the womb of a Virgin by divine creative power was conceived a Child. From His mother He took every human essential. From the Eternal He came, in very perfection, Deity. Born He was and lived, and grew, and labored, and loved, and died upon a Cross to which blinded men condemned Him because of the man-shaming beauty of His life. But God cannot be annihilated nor His will in becoming Incarnate be thwarted. From the grave He rose again to continued life. He left our sight at last, but He still lives on, forever Incarnate, forever God and Man. We have known Him and loved Him. We have known and loved God. We still love the Eternal and are loved by Him. In holy sacraments the human hand of God



still touches, strengthens, and ennobles. Even now we feel His infinite and yet finite compassion. We have known the Truth and the Truth has made us free."

It was this personal religion of an Incarnate God which swept the ancient world. Ever since, Jesus has been making men and women free, free from the inhibitions of mere intellectualism, free from the despair which lies at the end of all fearless thinking, free too, from the senseless round of inane activity, free to live and to laugh and to love and to dare. Some of them have been simple-minded people, like Francis of Assisi and John Wesley and Joan of Arc and Our Most Blessed Lady of Nazareth; but some of them have been among the mightiest thinkers of the world, like Origen and Abelard and Paul and Aquinas and Pasteur and Fabre and Romanes. Such people used their reason; but to them reason was not the only path toward Truth. By love toward and from Incarnate Deity they derived their knowledge of the things past knowledge, the things which matter most.

## 6. POSSIBLE PRINCIPLES OF POSTMODERNISM

THE Church can never be content with other than a positive message. The world is waiting for religious leadership; and no leadership is accomplished by negation. To insist upon Fundamentalism is to offend the good sense of the age; but mere denial of Fundamentalism is not enough. There must be affirmation, compelling affirmation. Modernism or Liberalism has as yet furnished little by way of substitute and even that which it has supplied, dependence upon the scientific method and the appeal to reason, will, as has been said, not suffice in a world convinced that for religious discovery scientific research can be of no service whatever and that the human reason is incapable, by virtue of inherent limitations, of dealing adequately with the problems involved; that by definition religion deals with the super-scientific and the more than reasonable. The time would seem to be at hand for a new school of religious aspirants, one in accord not with the prejudices of

scientists of a generation ago, but rather consonant with the convictions of scientists today. Fundamentalism is hopelessly outdated. Modernism has ceased to be modern. We are ready for some sort of Postmodernism.

It would be presumptuous for any one man to attempt to describe fully what that Postmodernism must be as it comes into its own. The need of the world for intelligent religion will call forth, is indeed calling forth, a great deal of earnest response. The Spirit of the Living God will create Postmodernism and in its making many individuals, as they seek to find answers to the problems involved, must make their contributions. All that one man can do is to state what, in a judgment based upon his own experience as a searcher for the Truth and his dealing with other intelligent men similarly engaged today, are some probable characteristics of Postmodernism. It is in that spirit, and with no illusion of peculiar inspiration from the Eternal to become the lone prophet of a new day, that I here set down some of the principles which must, as I see it, be those of the Postmodernist if he is to give spiritual leadership to our puzzled generation.

1. Only on the basis of the Incarnation is religion possible for an educated man today. If, in the pages that have preceded this, it has not been made plain what that means, any further at-

tempted elucidation would be useless. Suffice it to say further only that, at the moment at least, the emphasis needs to be upon the necessity for and the fact of the Incarnation rather than upon the manner of the Incarnation. The man who has accepted the Incarnation as a basis for religion does not often have much trouble in believing that when the Eternal came into humanity it was by process of partheno-genesis. Virgins give birth in the lower forms of life, as every biologist knows, and that such a thing should have happened, by the power of God, when the Virgin Mary conceived her son, offers no insuperable difficulty to one who believes that what was happening was no ordinary human conception but a unique event. Argument from the Virgin Birth to the Incarnation probably never convinced anybody. Once a man accepts the Incarnation and goes to work religiously upon its basis, this lately highly advertised stumbling-block to faith soon disappears. Postmodernism will not argue much about how Jesus came; it will focus its attention upon the major fact that He did come, God-made-man.

2. Postmodernism will frankly admit the possibility of miracles, although not in the sense which defines miracle as an arbitrary violation of natural law. It is unthinkable that the Eternal should have made laws for governing creation so defective that frequently He is compelled to annul

them. It is entirely thinkable, indeed, for the scientist it is necessarily true, that much of the law governing the cosmos is *in toto* humanly unknown and that much of what is known by man is only partially known. That things may happen, and do happen occasionally, which apparently deny the validity of what have appeared to man to be cosmic laws, every experimenting scientist knows, particularly those who deal with the less probed sciences, if one may use the term, such sciences as psychology. That the Eternal can, by the operation of laws unknown to man, bring about results which would be impossible under the operation merely of those laws which we do know, is a proposition so soundly logical and so consonant with experience as to meet with little opposition from intelligent people. What the scientist objects to is, first, any maintenance that cosmic laws are really breakable; second, the substitution of blind dependence upon possible miracle for the determined use of one's own brain and energy. The belief that God may cure a cancer, for instance, in answer to the prayer of a devout man, by the operation of laws governing the constitution of matter of which at present man knows next to nothing, is not what offends the medical profession. What irritates it is that any one should be foolish enough so to depend upon such possible miracle as to abandon a determined search for the cancer germ. The

modern man believes that when we were given brains we were intended to use them and that it is blasphemy not to employ them. Postmodernism will insist upon the same thing; and will continue to believe in miracles just the same.

3. To the Postmodernist the Incarnation will ever continue to be a miracle, the central miracle of all. That he understands the processes of the Incarnation he will not pretend. That he understands God at all, except in terms of the Incarnation, he will willingly deny. He will not explain the Incarnation but he will believe in it as a fact. He will do this not primarily because of the sanction of the Bible, although he will continue to give to the Gospel narratives the credence that contemporary, or nearly contemporary, documents always deserve for events alleged to have happened. He will believe in the Incarnation chiefly because millions of people, of every sort and race and class and culture, including many of the most intelligent individuals the world has ever known, have taken it as a basis upon which to build up the practice of the presence of God and have found that it forms a firm and satisfactory foundation for the cultivation of such love as does really reveal Him. It will seem to the Postmodernist highly incredible that flowers of such variety and such beauty should have sprung from an imaginary seed. The twentieth century man is even more fortunate than those to whom



Paul preached. They were compelled to accept their technic on his authority. We have the additional authority of the innumerable souls who have found that technic sufficient.

In depending upon such a sanction Postmodernism may well maintain that it is not acting unreasonably or doing anything exceptional but that, on the contrary, it is merely following, in its attempt to arrive at religious Truth, the invariable procedure of man in approaching every other sort of Truth. When a student starts studying Chemistry he is not turned loose, unguided, in a wilderness of chemicals, test tubes, and Bunsen burners and bidden to think things out for himself. He is told, not merely certain facts, but also certain entirely unproved theories about the constitution and action of matter,\* theories which chemists have been led to believe by their experiments as probably true. He is then urged himself to deal with various chemicals and to see whether or not they do react according to the assumed hypotheses. He discovers eventually that they seem to do so. No chemist ever can demonstrate absolutely the truth of those

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\* For instance, he is told of Avogadro's hypothesis, first presented in 1811, that under like conditions equal volumes of gases contain the same number of molecules. There is, it is true, a tendency among chemists nowadays to call this hypothesis a "law," but this is merely for the sake of convenience. It has never been proved and would seem to be unprovable; yet a very large part of modern chemistry is based upon it.

hypotheses. But it would be folly to say that neither teacher nor student ever comes to know the facts involved in Chemistry. Or, it may be, the pupil starts studying Geometry. He begins with certain unproved theories, usually those promulgated by Euclid. He is told to assume those theories, as mathematicians have done before him, with no proof whatever, and see whether experiment and reasoning carried on upon their basis show them to be useful and satisfactory. Nobody ever demonstrates these basic assumptions. Nobody can. But it would be ridiculous to say that therefore people never come to know Geometry. In religion the novitiate is also given an unprovable assumption, the Incarnation, an assumption which is sane, in that religion without it is unthinkable for an intelligent man, but still an assumption. He is told that millions of people have accepted it as true and that on its basis they have built a satisfactory approach to that Reality who can be discovered only by love. He is hopelessly out of touch with scientific procedure if he refuses to experiment in this religious technic until someone can demonstrate to him that admittedly undemonstrable axiom.

4. Postmodernism will readily and gladly acknowledge, what Christianity has always recognized, that for purposes of worship the Incarnation must needs be extended and continued

sacramentally. God is lovable, and through love knowable, only in terms of time and space. The Postmodernist will know that prevalent human instincts cannot safely be disregarded. In religion one of the most insistent of these instincts is that which insists that if God is to be loved He must be localized. Every religion has placed its Deity in a fixed spot, in imagination at least, for purposes of worship—every religion, that is to say, except Modernism. Even the older-fashioned Protestant, who rejected sacraments as superstitious, found that he must localize God somehow. He did it by making mental images of Him, in his own likeness, either seated in some far-off Heaven or hovering about in the immediate air. As for historic Christianity, it, from the very beginning, accommodated itself to this instinct by the sacramental system. Christians believed that Jesus, who is God, localized Himself in the water of Baptism in order to welcome the neophyte and wash away his sin; that Jesus localized Himself in the priest who pronounced forgiveness for wickedness repented of and confessed; that Jesus localized Himself in the hands of a Bishop to give the gift of the guiding Spirit in confirmation and ordination; that Jesus localized Himself in bride and groom as they contracted holy marriage; that Jesus localized His healing power in the holy oil; most of all that Jesus localized Himself in the sacrament of the

altar. As soon as Christianity emerges, an historic movement, we find its worship concentrated around the Lord's Supper or, as it came later to be called, the Mass. He was there present, to be adored, and loved, and prayed to, and received into one's lonely, needy self. Instead of being incarnate in a body of flesh, through which flowed blood like man's own blood, He made bread His body, wine His blood. At the center of everything Christian was the Mass.

That this meeting of man's instinctive need is as wise and as necessary as the Incarnation itself, the Postmodernist, who knows little and cares not a jot about those quarrels, and arguments, and misunderstandings which made the sixteenth century Protestant contend against the sacramental idea, will readily and gladly admit. He will no longer continue struggling toward a Jesus who is immaterial, ghostly, vague; nor will he try to find God merely by remembering Jesus as a God-man once entirely human and localized but not any longer quite human or localized. He will offer his most intimate worship where Christians have always found it easiest and best to offer it, to Jesus present on His altar. There he will shrive himself and offer himself; there in the silence he will wait for the voice of God to speak to him; there he will pray. And if some friend should reproach him for worshipping bread and wine, like an idolator, he

will be patient with the ignorance and the lack of imagination of that friend.

5. The Postmodernist will not seek to be unpleasantly dogmatic. He will have no desire to build up creeds of his own which may be crammed down other people's throats, creeds which deal with non-essentials and mere implications of the faith. He will be especially impatient of creeds expressed in terms of the outworn controversies of the sixteenth century. Because he is sane he will know that there can be no thinking without creeds, be they political creeds, or economic creeds, or scientific creeds, or religious creeds. He will have his creeds: the ancient formula of Nicaea and its shorter summary, the so-called Apostles' Creed. These creeds deal with primary, axiomatic things. Their chief concern is to assert that the Incarnation is a fact and that there is a Holy Spirit which comes from the Eternal through Jesus, who will guide men into all Truth. That this guidance has been fully furnished and is no longer to be operative will seem to the Postmodernist unreasonable. He is content with a basis for his faith. The rest will be revealed in due time.

6. Finally, the Postmodernist will not be an ecclesiast. To him the Church will have its only meaning as the guardian of the truth of the Incarnation and of the practice of its sacramental extension. It will have authority only when it speaks and



acts in its capacity of custodian. He will judge its words, its missions, its colleges, its cathedrals, all that it has, by the faithfulness with which it, through them, promulgates this faith and extends this practice. He will revere pastors, priests, bishops, popes, only as the proponents of this faith and practice. To him the Church will be admittedly divinely commissioned and empowered, but still merely an agency and not in itself sacrosanct. The Incarnation and the sacraments—these will be to him the things which matter.

As he attempts to state his position, the Post-modernist will be met by those who say to him, "What you really mean is that you are a Catholic." This will bother him little. Names do not mean much to him. Of course he does recognize, even now, that his belief and his technic are fundamentally those of the Catholic Church of the ages. He even maintains that he belongs to that Catholic Church. The resentments of the sixteenth century, the political intrigues of the seventeenth and eighteenth, the rationalistic complacencies of the nineteenth, even the prejudices of hooded fanatics in the twentieth, all of which have bade men tremble with mingled rage and horror whenever they heard the word Catholic, are alike almost meaningless today, at least to educated people. The Post-modernist looks with more approval upon Roman Catholicism than he does upon current Protes-



tantism, for while the latter seems to him chiefly a mad babble about nothing, he sees the former ministering to the souls of men and bringing them sacramentally and humbly to the feet of the Incarnate God. He does not commonly find himself, however, ready to become a Roman Catholic. He sees in that communion, despite of, and marring, its effectiveness today a certain uniformity of expression, an over-particularity in definition and a dogmatic assertiveness and externality in authority, all of which strike him as not consonant with the philosophy of love upon which, as he understands it, Christianity is erected. Indeed these seem to him, if he be thoughtful, to be themselves essentially Protestant errors. He sees, or thinks he does, that after the Reformation, and largely because of it, there came into things Roman a protective and resistive rigidity quite foreign to what had been her glorious state before the Reformation. If the Council of Trent and the logically resultant Council of the Vatican had never been, if St. Francis had not been superceded by St. Ignatius Loyola, probably the Postmodernist could be in communion with the Holy Father and would be, with much joy. As things are, he cannot be. The very language in which Rome describes the act necessary to reunion is an offence to him. He cannot "make his submission." He cannot think of "making a submission" to Jesus or to anything which purports to

represent Him. An infallible pope or an infallible hierarchy seems to his Postmodernist mind to contradict the technic of Jesus quite as much as an infallible book or an appeal to his own supposedly infallible brain.

Insofar as he exists at this moment, the Postmodernist is apt to be a man without a Church. Protestantism, Modernism, and Romanism alike seem to him to miss the point. In the Anglican communion he is more vocal than elsewhere. Usually he calls himself there by the name of "Anglo-Catholic" and feels that, although his fellow Churchmen tolerate him, they neither love him much nor try in the least to understand him. They imply, even when they are too polite to say it, that he is too much concerned with ecclesiastical millinery, that he is enamored of ritual and sentimentally attached to Medievalism. He is not altogether comfortable, either, in his not ill-grounded fear that at any moment the Anglican or Episcopal Church may throw in its lot with Modernistic Protestantism and bid him join that company of the sentimentally semi-intellectual. However, his freedom to practise the Catholic technic, so far at least, is more nearly possible there than elsewhere. Occasionally, like Dr. Orchard in London, he remains affiliated with the Congregationalists or some other sort of Protestants, and believes and practises his religion despite the burden of humorous pity which

his fellow Protestants pour upon him. In every communion he is to be found. Even in Rome he is not unknown. Wherever he is, he is for the most part misunderstood and inarticulate. As yet almost unnoticed, he continues his ponderings and his prayers, confident that modern thought demands him, sure that he is emergent. In this day of disillusionment he must have great faith and much humility. He is not sufficient, and he knows it; but as best he can he must make ready.

## II. THE MORAL REVOLT OF THE YOUNGER GENERATION



## THE MORAL REVOLT OF THE YOUNGER GENERATION

NOT long ago I conducted a series of meetings about religious problems in Sprague Hall at Yale University. One of the questions put into the question box was perhaps more than usually interesting. It ran, "Ethics means just what is customary. Why should I be a slave to mere convention? Is there any good reason why I should not maintain a mistress while at Yale, as long as I take good care of my health?"

This question was somewhat frank, even for a modern undergraduate, but is not to be regarded as at all a unique query. Our younger people everywhere, and particularly our more intelligent and informed younger people, are inquiring why, after all, they should be expected to remain chaste, and honest, and truthful, and self-sacrificing. They are not particularly ignorant, for the most part, of the content of morals. They are demanding something more fundamental. They are asking for a rationale of morals. And, it might as well be confessed, they



are having considerable difficulty in finding one. The inner significance of their revolt, real and not merely apparent, against established moral regulations lies in their inability to discover any sane reason for obeying them.

This, of course, deeply distresses all of us; and it hopelessly puzzles many. Is it not dreadful that these naughty children should revolt against the decent ways of society? In the minds of such persons as lift shocked hands at these wild girls and boys lies commonly the assumption that our moral standards are of necessity right with an eternal and essential rightness. We fail to perceive that it is this very assumption which is being questioned. We do not understand that youth will no longer respect our standards simply because they are ours; that we must devise an apologetic for our ethics reasonable enough and strong enough to persuade youth that it is necessary and valid.

That sounds insane to many older people. "Tut!" they exclaim, "things have come to a pretty pass when our children coming to maturity do not recognize that we are wiser than they, when they will no longer believe us if we tell them that these things are to be done and those things not to be done. Is the old authority of parents gone entirely?" The answer is that, at least in dealing with older adolescence, of course it has. Children will obey their elders up to a certain period, but all

modern educational methods teach them as they reach maturity to obey no one who cannot convince them.\* The typical collegian today—who sets the fashion ethically as well as in dress for his or her fellows of the same age in every walk of life—is taught to examine life fearlessly and follow only that which persuades. Such a person naturally is amused when the elders say, “This you must do; that you must not do; and on our say so.” Such a person says, “Show me why I must, or else I jolly well won’t.” And the trouble with us of the slightly elder generation is that, instead of telling him why, we get angry and sarcastic. Partly we resent his demanding to know why; and partly, we do not know why ourselves.

“Ethics,” of course, and “morals” are merely two words meaning “those things which are customary.” To an unreconstructed Igorot it is ethical to go head-hunting. To most people in early nineteenth century England it was moral to work women like horses in mines and to employ babes in cotton mills. In the south before the war it was commonly considered very immoral to seduce a white girl, but quite condonable to seduce a

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\* To a large extent this is true teaching. At the same time collegians are not being effectively taught that if persuasion is to be the method, persuasibility, or at least open-mindedness, in youth is prerequisite. It is very difficult for youth to be open-minded.

negress. There is nothing static about morals. Ethics changes with every generation.

Before anyone will accept the ethical standards of any people or period he must have a hearty respect for those people or that period, and believe that their rules serve good and beautiful ends. The plain fact is that our younger people have little respect for our generation, which has messed up industrialism, which produced the ghastly butchery of the past few years as its highest achievement internationally, which has well-nigh killed off the arts amid floods of rotogravures, broadcastings, and popular priced magazines, which produces few leaders in any humanistic field, and which bids buoyant youth to emulate and, even more difficult, to admire the sombre stupidity of merely commercial success. If the only authority for our ethics is us, we might as well say farewell to our children. Is there no deeper authority for conventional morals than the fact that they are conventional? There is, of course, but most of us ourselves do not know what it is. How can we then teach it to our children?

The only sane reason for being decent, honest, truthful, and the rest is that by keeping under our bodies and by refraining from exploiting our fellows we liberate our possibilities for the spiritual life. Except as a preliminary for living close to God our ethics is meaningless. Except for the

spiritual life and the fact that we should thus make it impossible, it were entirely sensible to keep a mistress, provided we saw that she and we were healthy; sensible to indulge in all sorts of flirtage which did not result in physical embarrassments and deterioration; sensible to lie, to exploit, to luxuriate, to look after number one, as long as we kept out of legal difficulties; sensible to believe that it is only the law of nature that in free competition the strongest and the most unscrupulous should survive. Christian ethics is built upon two principles: first, that the chief end of man is to seek after God and to find Him, and second, that our physical and social life must be so disciplined as to free the soul for this chief activity. Our whole moral system of today was originated by those who had these two principles firmly in their minds. We are to do those things which are conventionally right because in so doing we shall put lower natures in such a subsidiary place that they will not interfere with spirits finding God. That was the basis on which conventional morals was built. We ought to recognize that without religion as a basis our whole ethical structure is lacking in necessary sanction.

Ours is, for the most part, an irreligious but fairly moral generation. The fire of spiritual aspiration which led our fathers to originate and perpetuate certain ideas and ideals of right and wrong,

we have lost. The power which started the ethical wheels to going round has long since been turned off in most of us. We kept going, though, by a sort of moral inertia, until we hit a big bump. That bump was the war. The old ethical machine is not revolving now in business, in politics, in diplomacy, or in individual life. We must recreate the energizing fire, or else expect that a new and probably unchristian ethics will arise.

There is such a new ethics arising, a morality based upon a totally different conception of life and its values than the Christian or indeed the theistic conception. We have not taught our youth much about their souls or the possibility of spiritual development; but we have carefully and thoroughly impressed upon them the fact that they have bodies. We have moreover taught them that these highly important bodies, in nature and desires, are descended from and akin to those of the beasts. We have so taught them because this is indubitably the truth. We have, with much emphasis, convinced them that they are a more highly evolved sort of animal and have almost wholly failed to remind them that they are also something infinitely more. Ought we to be surprised that they estimate their goods and evils on the merely physical level? Is it to be marvelled at that they cannot see why perfectly natural physical impulses should be restrained? Is it inexplicable that to them Mrs.



Grundy should appear to have been a somewhat demented and decidedly hypocritical old lady, her prohibitions survivals of ridiculous taboos?

The challenge of youth ought to make us re-examine moral standards and reevaluate them. The very first thing we shall do if we are honest in such valuation is to admit that there is nothing Christian about restraints in themselves. Jesus' teaching is singularly lacking in "Thou shalt not's." For instance, He seems to have been quite out of sympathy with the current legalism in regard to impurity. He ate with sinners and was friendly and kindly in His dealings with several women of ill-fame. His sole recorded utterance about sexual impurity was the statement that to look on a woman with desire was as truly adultery as carnally to know her. The purpose of that utterance was evidently to reduce to absurdity the violent treatment of every factual manifestation of passion. Robert Louis Stevenson uttered the same truth when he said that while a man could remain physically chaste, no man could or did remain chaste in his mind. I find no evidence, in Jesus' teaching, of any special value put by Him on chastity as an end in itself.

Jesus never valued any merely negative virtues. He came not that men might deny life, curb and thwart impulses, or starve instincts. He came that men might have life and have it more abundantly.



The distinctive thing about His teaching is that He revealed and still reveals life as not merely a physical thing but also a spiritual thing. He shows to us how men and women may find their chief joy in contact and friendship with God. Just as it is a spiritual friendship between man and woman which transforms among us animal mating into human marriage, so Divine friendship lifts our whole life from a physical plane into something infinitely finer; and just as the regarding of married life merely or predominantly on the physical level will kill off the spiritual possibilities of that relationship, so undue attention riveted upon any mere physical impulses will kill off all spiritual delights.

Of most of this the greater part of our young people knows next to nothing. To the joys of spiritual aspiration it is quite uninitiated. To it man seems a more canny animal. We can persuade it to refrain from filling its life with carnal indulgences only by showing it that there are finer things wherewith to fill that life.

To show this is the task of bigger people than most of us are. If our slightly elder generation consisted of men and women whose lives were filled with urbane and lovely spiritual achievement, we could do it. That, however, is not the composition of our generation. Even the best of us are not good

so much as merely not bad. We have emptied our lives of evil, it may be, but then we have left them empty. Our goodness is not godlike; our decency is deadly dull. We ought not to be sorry that our children ask for jollier ways than ours. As a matter of fact most of us have in truth a sneaking admiration for the seeking youngsters. They may be wild, but at least they are not wooden; naughty, but not negative.

If we are in the least degree wise, we shall stop denunciation of youth and set about filling our own lives with a little spiritual reality. It is true that boys and girls all around us are pitifully squandering much of the best of life, living on a carnal plane, overvaluing sex, making common that which should subserve true love, cutting themselves off from the more beautiful joys. We do wish to help them. Then let us follow the example of Jesus, who has lifted men to higher life and joy and away from mere carnality not by scolding but by loving, and because not of what He refrained from being but of what He was.

Dear old Mrs. Grundy, patroness of degenerated Puritanism, is dead. Youth wishes to bury her. Let us not keep trundling about her increasingly unpleasant corpse. Let us join with youth and inter her with rejoicing. Then let us take our place by youth's side and adventure forth in search of God,

recognizing that in the act of finding Him our generation has been conspicuously inept. It may be that we can help youth to discover God; it may be that we shall prove the ones who need the help.

### III. RELIGION IN COLLEGES



## RELIGION IN COLLEGES

RECENTLY an ecclesiastic, grown old in honorable labors, wrote a book. He told his readers that, with advancing years, he had come to realize that the future depended upon youth, and that it is necessary for the Churches to conciliate young men and women. Therefore he urged that difficulties in religious belief should be tempered to them. For instance, he maintained, youth might well be told that the Apostles' Creed, with its definite statements that Jesus is God, born of a Virgin, resurrected from the dead, might properly be said even by one who did not quite acknowledge those statements to be literally true. It is not here purposed to dwell at length upon the curious neologism which makes the words "I believe" equal to "I accept as having an antiquarian interest." The ecclesiastic in question is old and honored for many good works and noble words, and it is not gracious to complain about his use of the English language.

It is, however, quite respectful, and perhaps not useless, to point out that in this address he uncon-



sciously bore testimony to his years. None but one who had passed youth could suppose that men younger than forty may be won to religion by lessening its difficulties or modifying its claims. A somewhat varied acquaintance with young men, particularly with those young men who may be supposed to have the most intellectual difficulties, those in our colleges or just graduated from them, has led the present writer to the conviction that a considerable part of the failure of the Churches to hold young people is due exactly to this attempt to solve intellectual difficulties by avoiding them or minimizing their legitimacy and importance. Just as young men are cynical about democracy because they are urged, not to solve its difficulties, but to accept, in its stead, a compromise with plutocracy masquerading under its venerable name, so they are frankly bored by a Christianity which they perceive is no longer the heartpounding challenge to serve a supernatural God-man, a religion of necessity super-reasonable as well as superhumanly dynamic, but now hardly more than a philosophy questionably logical, using ancient words and symbols in denatured ways. Old men may be, and often are, willing to accept such solutions; but not young ones. A young person with stuff in him will either accept democracy or reject it at the face value of its proper claims; he will not substitute a new and easier content and be satisfied because

the name has not been changed. He will accept or reject Christianity as a supernatural religion, and Christ as a supersensible phenomenon. He will not say he believes a creed unless he does believe it. The men who are won by emasculating theology are of questionable value to a Church which seeks to lead men and to establish the Kingdom of God.

It is not much of an exaggeration, if any, to say that only about one-tenth of our undergraduate population is both capable of thinking and willing to think.\* There are today many reasons why men go to college, besides the desire to develop the intellect. Social prestige; the supposed economic value of a bachelor's degree; the desire to acquire a profitable professional technique; the hope of putting off for a few years the necessity of entering upon the grind of productive labor; a vision of honors won by athletic prowess; a dream of good times, more or less sedate; parental ambition to make swans out of ducklings; these are some of the reasons why the collegian, before he gets his degree and afterwards, is not, for the most part, interested in anything requiring mental effort. He thinks

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\* This fact complicates collegiate administration, as will be easily imagined. Frequently one hears it urged that students be given large control over university policy. That would be admirable if undergraduates were essentially intellectual persons of scholarly ambition, and hunger for truth. Unfortunately, in America at least, this is not the case.

himself clever, but laziness and conceit are fully as characteristic of him as are clear thinking or high idealism. This is, to be sure, an indictment of someone—probably not of the colleges or of their students so much as of a social situation quite independent of our educational system.

Whoever is at fault, this fact should not be forgotten in estimating the religious demands of youth today. One should remember that the great mass of collegians merely reflects the social and religious attitudes common in society. The superficiality and complacency of these attitudes is plain enough. America, as much as any nation, is still content to estimate life in material terms. The campus echoes this. There is little heart-searching about the meaning of life. The usual undergraduate is not an immoral person; he has no wicked purposes. He confidently looks forward to a lifetime spent respectably in enjoyment of what seems to him harmless selfishnesses. He hopes to find his nice little niche in a secure social order. He seems unsuspecting of the fact that there are forces at work which make this career somewhat precarious. He is also unaware that to the thoughtful world as a whole, even now, not to speak of the past, a satisfactory meaning of life is not to be found in these terms. The search for extra-worldly contacts, the reality of the immaterial, he simply thinks nothing about.

Such persons ask that the Churches bother them

as little as possible. That religion should remain a decent appendage to life is their desire. Theological propositions matter little one way or the other. Let us be practical, conservative, content. The Churches, they think, without any clear reasoning about it, are worthy institutions; but the less fuss there is about dogma, the better. These are they who may respond to the method of approach referred to above. It is questionable, however, whether they will ever more than nominally respond, whether they are material to be recruited in anything worthy the name of spiritual adventure. It is not from such men that those have come who have contributed to the spiritual progress of mankind. To please them is a high price to pay for alienating the minority who are intellectually and morally in earnest, who have potential power of spiritual aspiration, and who demand of the Churches clear reality and unmistakable theological sincerity.

When one realizes that neologistic compromise is not the way to reach this minority, when one desires to put them in the way of attaining a reasonable and honest concept of God and of man's relationship to Him, one finds certain actual difficulties. Perhaps some of them may be enumerated.

The first and probably the most significant difficulty is the ignorance of the undergraduate regarding the actual content of religious belief. It is next to impossible for him to adjust religion to modern

science and philosophy, because he does not know what that religion is which is to be adjusted. Few of those who enter college have such knowledge when they come and, almost unaccountably when one remembers the importance of religion in the life of the race, they are rarely given an opportunity to learn it after they are matriculated.\* Usually only the vaguest religious ideas are found in the undergraduate, and these more emotional than intellectual. One finds spiritual inclinations and sentiments, rather than beliefs. The majority have received no systematic body of faith at all; and even the minority have rarely more than vague remembrances of things hastily crammed before they joined the Church or were confirmed. In this respect those who have come from Church preparatory-schools are little, if any, better off than the rest. A few Bible stories they remember, and some ethical principles more or less Christian, and not much else.

Obviously, if these men are to be assisted in arriving at vital religious convictions, they must first know what has been believed and why. To develop

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\* Almost every college has "courses in religion"; but these consist for the most part, as examination of catalogues will show, of literary studies of the Bible. Theology, ecclesiology, and liturgics—the intellectual content of religious belief and practice—seem to be as unknown as necromancy and astrology. Religious instruction in our halls of higher learning is mostly mush and milk.



a scientific attitude with no study of the physical investigations of the past, would be to use an absurdly wasteful method. To formulate a philosophy with disregard for all the speculations that men have made in former days, would be an absurd endeavor. It is equally difficult to work out a religion for today without giving due weight to the innumerable spiritual experiments of our fathers. Yet it is just this impossible achievement which we are asking of modern youth. My own college not long ago instituted a required course in religion for freshmen, in which the basic concepts of religions in general, and then the particular beliefs of Jews and Christians, were treated as objectively and as impartially as any other kind of knowledge. The professor in charge found, in his first session with the class, that not one member knew that in all religions the sense of sin and the demand for sacrifice were fundamental, or that both morality and spiritual aspiration had been built on these foundations; nor did anyone know that the priest had always been the forerunner of the prophet. Yet these are truisms to the student of religions. Less than one-fourth knew what has been the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, although all Christian theology and a considerable amount of Christian history have depended upon that belief. But perhaps the most significant fact in connection with this course was the discovery that other colleges re-



garded it as a strange and remarkable innovation.

A second difficulty, and one that powerfully affects thinking undergraduates, is the apparent failure of the Churches to deal either bravely or intelligently with social and international problems. They know that to divorce religion from utterance concerning business and politics is to deny its authority over life and to relegate it to the realm of things incidental. They believe that while the sundering of Church and State is necessary, it does not follow that the Church may rightly forsake its critical examination of statecraft. They are convinced that such an abandonment has taken place. They see little or no evidence that organized Christianity is seriously attempting to demand international peace or political justice. To them the war and its aftermath have shown the Churches willing to become the tools of clever and Machiavelian politicians. When they perceive that in emergencies the Churches have been ready to forget, and even to deny, the wisdom of Him whom they profess to acknowledge as God, they doubt the reality of ecclesiastical professions. Similarly, they think that the Churches are apathetic towards social maladjustments and barely tolerant of those within the ranks who are trying to explain the economic implication of divine teaching. They have learned that civilization based on self-seeking is apparently dying, and it seems to them that the

Churches perceive neither the gravity of the disease nor the necessity of cure. Rightly or wrongly, they find in this failure of perception evidence either of the venality of religious leaders or of an almost incredible stupidity; and when they are asked to accept the spiritual guidance of those whom they deem either knaves or fools it is not surprising that they show neither respect nor patience. There seems little likelihood of winning intelligent young people to the Churches, and to the spiritual truths committed to them, unless the Churches, both in their official utterances and in the personnel of those who work for them among students, can show at least as much social intelligence and social conscience as the undergraduates themselves possess.

Another thing that stands between the students and the Churches is the present widespread controversy between Fundamentalism and Liberalism. This division within the Protestant ecclesiastical bodies is not, to be sure, over the content of belief, but rather over a less important subject, the nature of the Bible. Thanks, however, to that quite general ignorance of dogma of which mention has been made, this distinction is not clear to our collegians. It is not even clear to more mature people. If it were, a prominent ecclesiastic, when he protested not long ago that, if a priest denied the deity of Christ, he did not belong in a communion which

believed in that deity, would not have been promptly classed with those Fundamentalists who insist that the Bible is a geological and biological textbook and that the theory of evolution is anathema.

Thinking students are overwhelmingly against the Fundamentalists. They are driven to that position by the inexorable compulsion of facts. It is unfortunate that the notion should be generally abroad that all who believe in the Nicene Creed hold to a discredited view of the nature of Scripture, that Christianity stands or falls with an attitude toward the Bible that is very far from ecumenical. Those who seek to discredit all religion have been quick to take advantage of this confusion in the mind of the student and the Churches have done little to clear it away. Even the non-Protestant bodies are suffering from this current controversy, for which they are not responsible and in which they have almost no share. Few sane students will seek religious guidance from those who appear to be afraid of modern criticism and impartial scientific study. There is great need that the Churches should make clear the difference between questions of dogma and questions of mere Biblical interpretation. Religion, after all, finds its real sanctions not in books, but in the spiritual experiments of human souls through the ages on the basis of revealed or supposedly revealed truths. As

Mr. Chesterton has somewhere said, tradition means extending the vote to one's ancestors. Dogma is merely the synthesis of experience. Christianity did its most conspicuous work in the first three centuries, when it had no official Bible to which to appeal, and its most solid work in the thirteenth century, when the Bible was very little read. Christianity does not stand or fall by whether the account of creation in Genesis is history or folklore, by whether or not Moses wrote the Pentateuch or St. John the Gospel which bears his name.

One may also believe that the Church's failure to interest students in religion is partly due to its emphasis upon activities. Youth is little impressed by drives, campaigns, and the other paraphernalia commonly used for promoting ecclesiastical bodies. Such projects have a necessary place in religious life, although the manner of their presentation is not often as spiritual as it might be. They exist, however, for those already interested and can scarcely be esteemed instruments of evangelization. The student is best approached with religion presented not as a program, but rather as a power. He responds to explanation more readily than to unexplained application. He wishes to know before he is asked to do. Many doubt this. They say, truly, that we procured the interest of men during the war by presenting to them a job to be done for their country. Why, they ask, is that not the proper

method to use in interesting them in spiritual things? Such persons forget that those who responded in the interest of patriotism had, before they were approached, a fairly clear understanding of what their country was and a sincere belief in it. Precisely what they do not have in religion is a reasonable understanding of what God is, and an honest belief in Him. This results in Christian programs failing to attract. The challenge to youth, because of this uncertain faith, is not sufficient to compel response. The call of God, as one who demands much or nothing, means little to him who has no conception of God. Christian programs, if it is merely a human Church which is asking, seem too difficult; if it is a deity who is asking, they seem commonly too trivial. At any rate, it is quite certain that the average student must know God, at least a little bit, before he will consent, even a little bit, to carry out a program.

Finally, one may perhaps venture a word about college chapels. Discontent with them is the rule, especially when attendance is compulsory. Observation will convince any impartial observer that the restiveness is due not so much to irreligion in the students as to irreligion in the services themselves. Most of them involve a great deal of preaching and lecturing and very little of devotion.\*

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\* It is almost unbelievable how stupid most collegiate chapel exercises are: held early in the morning on



Moreover, those who preach, commonly eminent clergymen quite out of touch with student life, seem frequently possessed of all the errors of approach which this paper is written to suggest. In addition, they too greatly substitute ethical for religious subjects. They seem woefully afraid to talk about God. Many of them also grossly over-estimate the worth of their auditors. One hears them assuring student congregations that the world is waiting for the undergraduates to save it and they assume, as needing no argument, that the students are important enough, intelligent enough, and spiritually vital enough automatically to contribute more than the older generation can contribute; all of which the auditors instinctively know is untrue. More than occasionally the mistake is made, also, of assuming that the undergraduate is impatient of spiritual instruction. This is far from the case. The earnest collegian wishes to be directed, with affection and understanding; and direction is what he almost never gets from the pulpit. So generally ineffective is college preaching that frequently thoughtful students have suggested to me the advisability of its abolition and the giving over of chapel time to devotions. This is probably too drastic a remedy,

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weekdays "to get the students out of bed"; commonly conducted in turn by perfunctory professors, men with no training in worship; disfigured by "announcements"; dull, ugly. It is an evidence of decent reverence to revolt from such an unnecessary travesty of worship.



since all the religious information now given in most colleges is confined to the sermon. A little is better than none. Certainly it would seem that the devotional side of chapel exercises might be made as dignified, as beautiful, and as reverent as possible, and that preachers might well be selected, less for their forensic reputations, and more for their understanding of student psychology and needs.

More serious than any particular fault in our handling of the undergraduate religious task is the general attitude of carelessness and inertia toward the whole problem exhibited by most collegiate administrators and faculties. Imagination, daring, and sound psychology alike seem lacking. By the present opportunist methods, and by willingness to surrender to the desires of those easy-going persons who prefer to dodge a problem rather than to think it out, incalculable harm is being done in colleges to the religion of America.

#### IV. THE CHURCH AND THE YOUNG MAN



## THE CHURCH AND THE YOUNG MAN \*

FIRST let me say why I dare to make the sweeping statements which follow. They are not conclusions evolved from preconceptions. Some of them go dead against my former notions. Nor are they the patter of one who has gone hither and yon on preaching trips through camps, or spent six months as an overworked, overworried, and overabused Y secretary. They are the cool, calm synthesis of some thousands of careful observations of men.

For eighteen months during the late war I acted as civilian aide to the Senior Chaplain at Great Lakes Naval Training Station. I superintended all chaplains' work in "Detention," where the men spent the first three weeks of their stay. I took a religion registration of nearly every man who came in. How many there were, I do not know exactly; but my records show that I gave the chaplains' instruction on religion and morals two hun-

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\* This article, written as I came out of service at Great Lakes Naval Training Station, is here included because it seems to me as valid now, after seven years of work with college men, as it did then.

dred and forty-seven times to groups composed of eighty-one thousand men. Almost all of these who were of my own communion were looked up by myself or my assistants. Several other communions looked up their men, too. Card-records of over four thousand men are available, all Episcopalians; and conversations with other pastors and chaplains have given me the results of work done by them among the men of eight other communions, Catholic and Protestant. It is safe to say that the observations leading to the following conclusions covered at least twenty thousand individual men, studied one by one by nine clergymen of various faiths.

Now that the source of evidence has been revealed, it is possible to state seven things upon which the vast majority of those with whom we talked seem to have been in essential agreement.

# I

Most modern American young men care little or nothing about organized religion. They are not anti-religious. They render to the Churches a formal respect. Only two per cent who entered the station denied a preference for some Church or other. For the most part, however, this connection had been purely nominal. Religion as a real motive-power, it is safe to say, is unknown to at least eighty per cent of them. Spirituality as presented

by the Churches has impressed them as not mattering much. With a majority of them church-going is a thing done almost solely for family reasons, or, in smaller places, for social reasons. In many little Western towns the church is the only rallying-place for young people. Many fellows go because they want girls, not because they seek God. When they leave home, they naturally stop going. Despite all the Sunday schools, young people's societies, clubs, guilds, parish-houses, and the rest, *the Churches ought to recognize that they have never gained the interest and the enthusiasm of eight out of ten of the generation just coming to maturity. As far as vital motivations go, these fellows are not Christians at all, but merely more or less decent young pagans.*

## II

Most of the men themselves are none too proud of their irreligion. After work in camp one realizes as never before that "man is an incurably religious animal." When asked why the Churches have failed to touch them, they are, naturally, for the most part at a loss. Few of them have thought much about it. They try hard to put it into words, however, glad to find parsons who admit that possibly all is not well in Zion. They are very frank, yet kind enough withal.

It is interesting to note what are some of the



things which they do *not* mention as alienating young men. Rarely does one hear that the ancient creeds are difficult to believe. Apparently the healthy, simple man in the street shares little of the intellectual doubtings of the musty browser among books. Few cite the selfish inadequacy of a faith which bids men save themselves from hell. That quaint and fearsome Calvinistic motive, so bothersome to Mr. Wells and Judge Lindsay, has, apparently, save in a few rural neighborhoods of the Southwest, never been presented to most young men of this generation. The disunity of Christendom bothers almost no one. Partly with regret it must be said that apparently the need for a reunited Church is felt at present chiefly by the clergy.

Most of these young men had no fault whatever to find with the Churches as such. All their criticism was leveled at Church members. They had a notion that they did rather like Christianity—little as they know of it. They were sure that they did not like Christians at all. Their feeling came to this in most cases—that, if Christian people would only endeavor to be Christians, the ordinary young fellow would like nothing better than to come along and try it with them; and that, if Christians wanted them to be interested, *those Christians might well stop criticizing the Church and start criticizing themselves.*

## III

The men believe that those who have the Church's teaching in hand are largely to be blamed, in that the instruction given, both from the pulpit and in classes, is either over the head of the average man, or hazy and indefinite, or both. People justifiably desire a religion the basic principles of which they can clearly comprehend.

In this respect the ordinary Sunday school seems quite to have failed. It has imparted a certain number of disconnected Biblical stories, more or less interesting, about people long dead, and a few moral maxims; but most boys seem to pass through it with little knowledge gained of who or what God is, of how to get power from Him, of how and why to worship Him. Part of this is no doubt due to inadequate teachers; but much of it can be laid to the modern tendency to substitute ethical culture for religion, which bewilders and bemuses the ordinary man.

This same tendency, combined with clerical overestimate of the intellectual complexity of the man in the street and clerical thinking in terms of abstract ideals rather than in those of personal relationships, seems to be the explanation of a common resentment at sermons. Men hate them, not because they are uninterested in God, but rather because most sermons tell them nothing much definitely about God.

The Christian religion is not at all a difficult and complex thing, requiring great intellectual gifts for its comprehension. The Apostles were unlettered and untraveled men. Most of the saints have been quite simple folk. It must be, then, if men to-day so generally find it hard to discover what Christianity is, that the preachers are not good preachers and the teachers are poor teachers.

After much talk with the men, the following simple line of thought was propounded to a Roman Catholic priest and to Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist, Disciples, and Episcopalian clergy, all at Great Lakes, and inquiry made as to whether in their judgment it was a correct expression of the essence of Christianity:

“Man grows great by sacrifice willingly undertaken, and small by selfish acquisitiveness. To succeed, a man must become an unselfish sacrificer. To live a sacrificing life is difficult, since it requires power to control a body inherited from the beasts and full of selfish impulses, and also an ability to tell the canny, cautious, compromising world that its wisdom is folly. In fact, this is so hard to do that the ordinary man cannot accomplish it unless he is conscious of God, the Great Heart of Things, back of him, with him all the way. To know and feel God is necessary for moral achievement, at least with most men. Some exceptional people get this contact with Deity by a sort

of subjective mysticism; but most men find this normally impossible. God, therefore, knowing that man must have a Deity expressed in those human terms which alone are comprehensible to him, became man. Jesus Christ is God, the only God that can be real to most people. In the light of Him and through Him, alone, are the eternal Creator, called the Father, and the mystical God who speaks within human hearts, called the Holy Spirit, understandable and knowable. The Father, the Christ, and the Spirit are One God, and the point of contact is the Christ, met in prayer and sacraments."

The various ministers consulted all agreed that this was, in very essence, the Christian religion. Admitting that it is, why have the great mass of young men never grasped it? Apparently our teachers are to blame, in that they have beclouded the simple faith in mazes of intellectual liberalism and oceans of words. *If we are not to continue to lose young men, we must return to the teaching, in concrete definite terms, of the essence of Christianity.*

#### IV

"There is among the men a widespread resentment of sentimentality in worship and "the cult of the pretty-pretty." It is hard, but not impossible, to get particulars. To put it in somewhat more philosophic terms than they use, it would

seem that they condemn contemporary worship on two grounds: first, that it is vicarious; second, that it is introspective.

They do not like choirs, complicated canticles, elaborate anthems, or sweet solos. Though they may do it badly, they like to sing their own praises to the Most High. The minister does too much, also, and they themselves too little. They miss the corporate note in devotion.

Since they are healthy-minded young things, they resent having their spiritual attention turned inward. Their interests are in things outside themselves. The God they want is a friendly Deity from Somewhere Else, who comes to meet and help them. The immanence of God is not to them so helpful a truth as his transcendence combined with his willingness to meet them. This is probably the reason why the men in service, Protestant as well as Catholic, loved the Holy Communion, and wanted it. However they might explain it, they felt that it is one act of worship where God comes from Out There to strengthen, and be revered by, men Down Here.

*The externalizing of God and the congregationalizing of devotion seem to be the best ways of desentimentalizing worship and fitting it to the desire of young men for virility in the services of our Churches.*



## V

Lack of friendly fellowship in the Churches is another great difficulty. The men feel that many congregations are maintaining religious clubs for their own pleasure, instead of houses of prayer to God and places of spiritual inspiration to all men. These clubs are of two sorts, equally to be avoided. One variety gives the chance visitor the impression that the people who belong to it resent his coming in without first giving them the chance to "black-ball" him if they desire. The other sort is so anxious for more members that it effusively canonizes him the instant he enters the door. When he goes to church, he would like to have people make him feel that, as a child of God, the place is his to use—that he is already a member of the congregation simply by virtue of his desire for worship and instruction. Of course, he does not like rented sittings. They are to him patent evidences of the club idea. *He misses that casual, quiet friendliness which he instinctively feels is what Jesus Himself really stands for. He wishes that with God's people, as with God, there were less respect of persons in God's House.*

## VI

Probably the most difficult criticism to meet is that professing Christian people are not really in earnest in their desire personally to imitate Jesus.



It seems to many men, and those the most worth while, that the moral standards of Church people are too low. Not that men desire more negative morality, more "Thou shalt nots." Far from that! It is positive morality that seems to them defective. Christians do not strike them as conspicuously more kind, more charitable, more loving, and more sacrificing than other men and women—particularly, more sacrificing. They see prominent Church people quite content to live in luxury, to enjoy the good things of the earth, earthy, even, while thousands of well-meaning, honest, hard-working men, women, and children have too little carefully and cannily to take thought for the things of to-morrow.

Clergy as well as laity seem to them equally guilty. That a minister should live at ease while his neighboring fellow minister half starves seems strange to them. That a clergyman should ask and get six weeks or more in which to play in the summer does not to them seem an evidence of zeal for souls. They find "gentlemen-parsons" somehow incongruous with the worship of a penniless Christ.

Of course, a good deal of this criticism of ministers and people is harsh, cruel, unjust. Most of it, however, is honest and ineradicable.

*No one thing, save simple teaching, is so necessary for the holding of young men to Christianity as the revival, in very real, apparent, and concrete*

*terms, in the twentieth century, of the spirit of Franciscanism.*

## VII

Last, but not least, young men wonder why it is that Christian people are unwilling to tell to others the strength and joy that there is in their faith. Does one who finds a new brand of very good cigars at the canteen keep the discovery to himself? On the contrary, he gladly commends the brand to his comrades. If he sees a good show while on liberty, he passes the word along. If indeed Christians have discovered the greatest thing in life, a faith which makes God real and kind and near and human and helpful, which makes, with power from Him, weak men strong to attain to real manhood instead of mere educated beastliness, how can they keep quiet about it? *To professing Christians their reticence may seem an evidence of reverence. To the man in the street it signifies merely disbelief.*

Such are the charges leveled at Church people by actual young men. Some of them were college men. Others could scarcely more than write their names. They came from every profession and trade—and from none. Most of them were from seventeen to twenty-five years of age. Some were from great cities, some from small towns, some

from villages, some from farms. They were a cross-section of American civilian young manhood.

They were not irreligious. They were pathetically ready for spiritual leadership. They threw no bitter slurs at the faith that has made saints and heroes of men like them in the ages past. One could not help but feel that many of them might become simple and happy Christian men, and that their younger brothers might never drift away at all, if only Christians might with penitence reconsecrate themselves, clergymen and people, to definite preaching of the fundamental faith, social worship of an objective Jesus, quiet fellowship in devotion, humble seeking to live a Christ-like life, and unaffected utterance of the faith that is in them.

V. VICTORIAN ETHICS AND  
RELIGION TODAY



## VICTORIAN ETHICS AND RELIGION TODAY

THE most difficult task before you," said the officers of a Christian association in a certain university to a clergyman who was about to conduct a series of conferences on the campus, "is not so much getting students to give allegiance to Jesus Christ as the persuading them that Christians ought to associate themselves with the Church." This information might have been given with equal pertinence in almost any collegiate center. It is not unreasonable or exaggerated to say that one of the chief hindrances to the promotion of Christianity among young people of intelligence is the definite distaste they have for certain ecclesiastical attitudes of mind. It is a mistake to suppose that the incoming generation is irreligious. It is wrong to think that generation unable to believe essential Christian teachings. There is difficulty in persuading it that Christianity may be compelling even though the Church be unenticing.

It is unfortunate for everyone concerned that



this should be so and the difficulty should be made as temporary as possible. Organized Christian bodies must be asking themselves what it is in them and in their methods which repels from the Deity these highly important young people whom they are seeking to interest in Him. It is the duty of everyone who studies youths and loves God to suggest what seem to him unfortunate attitudes in ecclesiastical psychology. After five years of almost constant work with undergraduates in many colleges, one has a memory crowded with impressions secured from personal interviews and from observation of undergraduate reactions to sermons preached and heard in college chapels and to efforts made to reach men and women. These impressions have integrated into certain beliefs. Chief among these is a conviction that it is largely the survival of two ethical attitudes in the Churches which serves to repel young people from them and from their message.

Most of the ecclesiastical bodies that work in America, particularly non-Roman America, took their present form and adopted their current methods under English influences in the nineteenth century. Even the Episcopal Church, daughter of the Church of England, although it boasts an ancient lineage and possesses a fixed polity at least three hundred years old, is really, in its present attitudes, the facture of the last century. It is not

hard to understand how these Churches have retained, to their own great hurt, certain Victorian ethical postures which more intelligent people have nowadays, for the greater part, abandoned.

The basic conviction of the Victorian mind was that life is a fixed, static, essentially completed thing. Of course there were exceptional Victorians, men and women who did have a dynamic concept of the universe; but they were exceptions and were, as a rule, regarded as persons of loose intelligence and suspected morals. To the Victorian, law was law, immutable, rigid. To him the only difference between Rome of the Caesars or Europe of the Middle Ages, on the one hand, and his own imperial England on the other, was that they had disobeyed the eternal ethical regulations and had perished while Britain was obeying and therefore enjoying God-given prosperity. "As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be" applied not merely to the Eternal Himself but, in the most minute particulars, to everything mundane as well. Mr. G. K. Chesterton has lately remarked the extraordinary failure of Victorians to realize that industrial society had evolved and was evolving and that their Capitalism had appeared in this long growth as a comparatively modern and untried experiment. They assumed that since Capitalism was in their day, it had always been and always would be. This is not an isolated phenomenon but a

symptom of a universal misconception about life. The middle classes, who controlled all thought, were so pleased with themselves, with their semi-detached villas at home and with their commercial empire abroad, that they came to regard these good things as the everlasting will of the Heavenly Controller of the Universe. They forgot what the civilization of their fathers had been and what the moral principles of the past had been and they ignored utterly that their children might in their turn produce something in both of these respects quite different. They who assumed stability in every particular of their civilization naturally assumed the essential validity of the morals and manners which grew out of and expressed that civilization.

Most of the English Churches during the nineteenth century were controlled by middle-class persons utterly possessed by this current, unevolutionary conceit. In America organized religion was in the hands of those not at all unlike their ecclesiastical cousins overseas. For good or evil, America in the nineteenth century is intellectually remarkable chiefly for its facility in imitating the English whom she patriotically pretended to despise. In both countries, during this long century, while the formal doctrines and the written politics of the Churches changed very little, there were fostered certain ways of thinking, not derivative from or

dependent upon professed creeds, which colored the whole ethical approach. It is these mental attitudes, unwritten but real, which today repel a generation which no longer thinks of life as fixed and stable but as evolutionary and dynamic, which is sure that Victorian civilization is a thing to which man can never return and will never wish to return, and which finds Victorian ethical pre-suppositions unfitted to the life it is called upon to lead.

There were two of these pre-suppositions which today seem especially irritating.

First, there was the assumption that moral codes are by very necessity unchangeable. There is, to be sure, an invariant ethical principle to which every Christian must give allegiance if he be a Christian at all, a principle definitely preached by Jesus and dramatized by His cross—that men grow great by sacrifice for God and brethren, and small by self-seeking. The Victorian went much further than that. Even in minute particulars his code of Christian morals and manners was immutable. Only rarely was there an independent mind which could see how varied were the actual sources of that code: partly Mosaic, partly Pauline, partly Teutonic, partly neoclassical, partly due to the necessities of the steam engine, partly Calvinist, partly Catholic. To most people it was one single code, forever unchangeable and un-

changing. To say to a good Christian of 1875 that, for example, at one time it might be good Christianity to put out one's money on interest and at another time it might be mortal sin so to do, would have seemed to him somehow to involve a denial of the majesty of God. That what is good and proper now may be not only improper but definitely evil a hundred years from now, would have seemed a statement not only blasphemous but insane. There could be no evolution of Christian ethics conceivable by a generation which ignored the possibility of any evolution at all. The jot and tittle of the law was to the Victorian as the Sabbath had been to the Pharisees, the master of men rather than their servant.

Our young people may, as is often claimed, not learn very much in our colleges, but they do for the most part get at least the idea that ethical standards are greatly influenced by changing economic and social necessities; that particular applications of Christ's general law of love have changed, are growing, and certainly will continue to develop. They resent any assumption on the part of the Churches that if one is to be a Christian one must behave like a Victorian. They know that John Chrysostom was a Christian, even though he would have been sent to a hospital for insane anarchists had he lived in the nineteenth century London or New York; that Francis of Assisi was a Christian,



although he would have seemed both criminally improvident and desperately lazy to Samuel Smiles; that Jesus of Nazareth was a Christian, despite the fact that He denied the validity of militant patriotism. When once our youths learn what is Christ's real ethical attitude; when they find Him seeking to produce character not by rule or by scolding but by love; when they hear Him stress positive rather than negative virtues; when they find that to Him a denial of sensual lures is of no value except as an initial step in the pursuit of more real satisfactions—they find all that attractive and sane. Paul's law of responsibility in liberty seems to them modern and fresh. But much of the ethics conventionally preached, the insistence upon the value of giving things up, the ridiculous exaggerations of alcoholic prohibitionists, the confusion of conventionality with virtue, the maintenance of nineteenth century behavior as a *sine qua non*, they find musty, stale, and extraordinarily unintelligent.

The second mistake in the realm of ethics which our Churches have inherited from their Victorian fathers is the forgetting that individual moral character is an achievement to be attained by gradual and painful growth. Consistent with the whole nineteenth century concept of life as static was the notion of moral character found *instantanter*. That one can develop morally only by a series of



personal experimentations, in which failures become the foundations of success, our Anglo-American grandfathers found it easy to forget. They not only failed to see that all adults are children; they even hated to regard children themselves as children. The heroes of their moral tales for youngsters, little Rollo and his merry fellows of both sexes, were not children; they were "little men and women." Human beings were actually regarded in those days as capable of reaching maturity. If they behaved like children, if they made silly mistakes and were sorry and so learned better, they were wicked people. Two effects followed. In the first place, men and women were encouraged to judge their neighbors, not as struggling folk to be allowed for but according to whether or not they fully met the requirements of all moral standards. In the second place, they became so afraid of the cruel judgments of their fellow men that they not only ceased to acknowledge their faults but also developed a moral pretense quite beyond the achievement of any people in history. It became a necessary virtue to appear to be better than one really was. Not many got to the point of declaring that they could not sin; but it was almost a point of honor to insist that one did not sin. Always one acknowledged in the services of the Churches that one was indeed a miserable sinner, but this was a general statement; in particulars one was, of

course, impeccable. One attained moral maturity instantly, like the nascent Minerva.

This lack of childlikeness, without which one may not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, was due to the Victorian's having forgotten Heaven. He was wont to sing many hymns about that land beyond the grave. He would have been astonished to learn that anyone suspected in him a lack of supramundane interest. Nevertheless, he rarely had any vital conception of a state of life where alone there could come to mystical fruition that in human character for which one here on earth strove, and strove in vain. He would have nothing of the ancient doctrines of post-mortem purgation and growth preliminary to celestial achievement; he felt no need of such doctrines. Straight from earth to contemplation of the Beatific Vision he was sure that conventionally proper persons went at death, and found it no soul-shaking change at that.

In short, the Victorian made one fatal mistake when he thought of his age as ethically full-grown; another mistake when he supposed himself morally educated instead of educatable.

To those who made these mistakes the ancient cultural methods for developing character meant little or nothing. Alms-giving they systematized and regarded from a utilitarian point of view; fasting was considered an antiquarian habit; prayer became egocentric, almost wholly petition;

sacramental penance was thought positively immoral. All one needed to do in order to be good was to will to be good and to conceal any possible shortcomings, as far as one could do so, not merely from others but from one's own self. The very word "casuistry" fell into ill repute. It means, properly, the fine art of applying general ethical principles to individual souls which are struggling to attain, little by little, to the standards they know to be worthy. The Victorian degraded this good word and made it mean a dishonest attempt to avoid moral obligations by hair-splitting. What else could it mean to an age convinced of its own maturity and sufficiency?

No one really understands our young people until he perceives that they regard neither themselves nor their elders with any cosmic awe.\* They understand well enough the childish immaturity of what some of them are fond of calling "the more or less human race." A Church which eliminates humility, in the Victorian fashion, from its psychological attitude, appears to them a little ridiculous. Paul would find them understanding enough were he once more to say that, having preached to others, he was himself in mortal terror lest he prove in the

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\* It is young people with some sense of religion, but alienated from the Churches, of whom I am here speaking. That limitation should be remembered. The great mass of young people regard themselves with serene complacency. Compare pp. 83-85.

end a castaway, or were he to tell them that he, even though an Apostle, so continuously sinned by omission and commission as to be a truly pitiable man. If the Churches would appeal to them with the message that, as one of our own poets has said,

"Immortality is not a gift;  
Immortality is an achievement;  
And only those who strive mightily  
Shall possess it," \*

and bid them struggle along a pathway of endeavor, failure, contrition, confession, and renewed endeavor; if they would freely admit that there is no bishop, pastor, elder, vestryman, or president of the Ladies' Aid who is more than a striving child that vaguely glimpses what it means to become a human being: there would be less irritation at what seems humbug and pretense, to stand between young people and the spiritual life. If to this sort of message were added the frank statement that much of our current morality is outdated and in no sense essentially Christian; that what men do for God and man is more important than conventional regulations which they may happen to keep; that there are hosts of problems the application to which of Christianity the churches have only begun to make; that the courage of

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\* Edgar Lee Masters, *The Spoon River Anthology*, page 217.

youth is needed in the councils of the churches that they may make this application: if all these things were made clear, young men and women might see more easily than now they do that the churches can be a help and not a hindrance in the development of an honest and vital religion.

## VI. RELIGION AND CIVILIZATION





## RELIGION AND CIVILIZATION

IT IS a common enough thing nowadays to find it maintained that what we must have is more religion. No end of bright and clever people say that, by word of mouth and in articles and books. It is not always clear exactly what they mean by it. A careful study of these numerous utterances leads one to the observation that by religion they generally mean a spirit of respectable geniality and law-abiding humanitarianism. There must be no dogma in it, they usually tell us; it must speak as one of the scribes and in no wise with authority. One draws the impression that there must be no ritual in it, either, or very little. It is rather the sort of thing which people feel who listen, in an atmosphere of respectability, to urgings that we should all help one another pursue the good, the true, and the beautiful. And we are told that if we all drink of this thin and somewhat saccharine spiritual beverage, a wonderful thing is going to happen. As a result of all this religion we are going to save civilization. I should like to devote a

few paragraphs to the saying of two things: first, that this sort of genial good humor is not religion, but quite another thing, of which we have too much already and not too little; and second, that the purpose of real religion is not to save society, but to do something infinitely more worth while.

A wise and Christian woman who teaches in a New England College has described, in words bitter but searching, this modern thing which masquerades as religion. It is "suave mannered," she says, "pleasant-voiced; endangering nothing in particular; an ornament of the Sunday pew; devoted to good causes in proportion to their remoteness, intent upon promoting safe philanthropies and foreign missions but, as far as affairs at home are concerned, ignorant alike of the ardors of the mystic or the heroisms of the reformer; cheerfully assuming that whatever is innocently agreeable is religious; . . . careless dependence upon an affectionate God; a domestic religion, calculated to make life pleasant in the family circle, and curiously at ease in Zion."

It is a harsh quotation, but not much exaggerated.

What is wrong with this very modern, humanitarian, non-theological, non-liturgical religion is not difficult to see. What makes it banal, what makes it to many people, and especially to young people, often a bit of a bore, is that its devotees ac-

tually suppose that man himself is the center of the universe. It is more truly anthropomorphic than even the most crude savage superstition. Superstition tells people to worship a God who is like a man. This new conception of religion bids us worship man himself.

It is a faith for people without a sense of humor, devoid of imagination. Science has long ago upset the notion which our fathers naively had, that physically everything, sun, moon, and stars, revolves around the earth. At such an idea the modern man smiles indulgently. But our fathers would have shouted aloud with body-filling laughter at the even more ludicrous notion held by the modern man that spiritually everything, cherubim, seraphim, and God Himself, revolves around the human race. The older day knew better. Human life is fast-flying and full of uncertainty. Man is a child, searching for something of Truth; brave and beautiful, it may be, and to be respected, but tragic and pathetic, too. His life is a search for reality, for a love which cannot be satisfied by earthly things, or even by human affection. There is a meaning to things somewhere. There is someone who can love and whom to know and to love is life. There is a being behind and within and beyond the little that we see and feel. He alone can satisfy a man's hungry heart. He it is who is Truth. He is the center of all spiritual reality. To

find Him is enough. To have all else and to miss Him is to find all else but dust and ashes. The search for Him is what life is for. To know God, who passes knowledge, that is to find one's self. All the religions of the earth have taught that much. From the days when the primitive savage knelt before some supposedly sacred tree or some possibly holy stone and thrilled at the thought that somewhere within created matter lay and vibrated a force, a power beyond his knowing, into contact with which he must somehow come, on through the ancient religions into the great faiths of Zoroastrianism, and Brahminism, and Buddhism, and Mohammedanism, and Judaism, and Christianity, men everywhere have understood that God is all that really matters and that religion is the pathway by which they humbly and hungrily draw near that they may live. It has remained for the modern world to conceive of man as in himself constituting the sacred center of things and of God as a dear, helpful sort of maiden aunt whose chief business is to coddle the children. To say that God loves man is a wonderful thing in the mouth of the religious people of the ages, for it has meant that the creative Eternal had compassion upon man, His creature. There are a good many people nowadays who think it is a gracious act on their part to permit the Deity to love them at all.

In the name of the great mystical souls of the

past, in the name of the millions of men and women who have sought humbly after God if haply they might a little find Him, it needs to be said that this anthropocentric sentimental benevolence, which will have no teaching about the Eternal, no theology, but insists that God must be an amorphous influence surrounding and serving humanity; which, in its approaches toward God, has little of awe, little of humble adoration, of mystery, and solemnity, and reduces worship to the level of a pleasant Sunday at the club; is not religion at all, but may very easily become mere pride, vain glory, and hypocrisy, from which we ought to pray to be delivered just as much as from envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness.

It may possibly be that this sort of lofty humanitarianism is destined to save the world. It seems hardly probable. The cult smacks somehow of the privileged classes. The great multitude of working people do not love humanity. They do not even think about humanity. They love their brothers and have compassion on one another. It is the man who is isolated from his brothers, by accident of class or misfortune of occupation, who goes in for the higher humanitarianism, loves the human race as such and, usually, is fretfully impatient with human beings. However this may be, even supposing that humanitarianism, perfumed faintly with the odor of sanctity, is going to save the world, let



us at least be honest enough not to call it religion, the high and humble search by man for God, or to ask that the Church devote her time and effort to its promotion. A great new building in New York, we are told, is to be "a house of prayer for all people." Some have attacked this statement, saying that it is not for all people. However that may be, *it is* a house of prayer. It will not stand through the ages on the top of its high hill for the auto-elevation of humanity by its own genial boot-straps. It is to be what every Church ought to be, a house of prayer, where men and women shall in deep humility and with hungry hearts lift up themselves toward Him whom truly to know is the only life that matters. As David the King said of the ancient temple, "This palace is not for man, but for the Lord God." If to believe that God is infinitely greater than man, and more worth loving, and seeking, and knowing, be superstition to this age, then the Church must continue to be a house of superstition. The ages past and the ages to be have a different name for it. That God is all and that man has as his chief end to know Him and to enjoy Him forever is not superstition. It is religion. No baser coin can take its place in the high commerce of men.

It is quite natural that people who think that man is the center of the cosmos, and therefore of religion, should suppose that the end and aim of

the Church is to save civilization, to preserve the social order. I am told that there are people who give wealth to the Church on the supposition that it will insure the *status quo*. I have even been told that a few people have given money to build cathedrals with the notion that somehow they will be fortresses of social conservatism. It ought to be obvious enough that money so given constitutes a poor investment. The Church has not been successful hitherto, or indeed much interested, in preserving the *status quibus*. Nor is it concerned with trying to overthrow the *status quo*. Why should it be? The Church has seen several kinds of social order succeed one another, flower, rot, and die. The Roman social order was the first one. The Church was born into that. It was a militaristic world-empire, built on coercion and law. It rotted with selfishness and crumbled away. The Church went on. Then came the chaotic time of readjustment and out of that emerged a feudal social order, at first more Christian than that which had been before and than any that has come after. It flowered, and it withered, and it died. And the Church kept right on. Then came a world built on private enterprise and trade. It lasted for about two centuries and a half and it became impossible and was supplanted, leaving behind it curious survivals like Jeffersonian democracy and the idealism of the 1840's and that talk about the abstract freedom of man of

which one still hears a bit. That Adam Smith sort of social order died, too, about a century ago. But the Church kept on. Our present civilization is based upon capitalistic control of the stores of the earth and of the power driven tool. It is developing at great speed, growing out of hand, pushing the mobs into the cavernous cities, taking from the individual the joy of craftsmanship, penalizing family life, and generally running amuck. It creaks and groans in labor disputes, smirks in divorce and mis-directed sex, and occasionally crashes in world war. The Church of the living God did not make it. Men made it. Whether it can be tamed by its creators no one can be quite sure. It may prove a Frankenstein monster which turns to rend its makers. At any rate, everyone admits that the present social order is a bit shaky. The Church does not care whether it survives or not. If it perishes, the Church will go right on, religion will go right on. God sitteth between the Cherubim, be the earth never so unquiet. The great ecclesia will stand on its heights long after capitalism has gone to join feudalism, and imperialism, and Bolshevism, and has been supplanted by some other interesting notion or other in the way of social order.

But, perhaps it may be asked, has the Church no social message at all? To be sure it has. Through the ages God has revealed with ever increasing

clearness that only those who love their fellow human beings can approach the glowing heart of God. "If a man love not his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" The prophet of old said that one must do justice and love mercy before he can walk humbly with his God; and that to do those three things is the whole duty of man. And Jesus Christ says that we shall love God with all our heart, and soul, and strength, and mind, with all our *power* of loving, and that this will involve loving our neighbor as ourselves. You must love God and be loved of Him to have life mean anything, says the Church, and the experience of the ages gives agreement, and in order to be acceptable with and by God, you must love men and women and little children.

That was ever the message of Jesus, who by His Incarnation has made God comprehensible and lovable. You can search His sayings through and find no command to be humanitarian. You will find no urging that we should seek the good, and the true, and the beautiful. You will find awe, and reverence, and humility, both practiced and prescribed toward the Eternal, and charity, and human kindness, and sacrifice, and true affection, both prescribed and practiced toward men. You will search and search in vain for any pleas for the necessity of preserving civilization, that of His earthly day or that of any other day. To Him, if

men would act humanly toward other men and would humbly and reverently seek God, civilization would take care of itself. He knew that as long as any civilization made those two things easy and natural it would live and that when it ceased to make them possible it would perish. That was all there was to that.

If our civilization continues to develop along lines of the sacred rights of property instead of on lines of the sacred rights of men, if control of wealth is given to people who do not love, if men are to be divided into masters and servants, capitalists and laborers, instead of united as brothers and friends, it will not be long before capitalism is as dead as the dodo bird and a captain of industry will be as curious an antiquarian figure as a feudal knight in armor. It will not be the Church which overthrows. It will simply be another case of men who have defied the Lord and built a city on another than the Lord's commanded bases. And as for preserving, as for keeping the ins in just because they are in, that surely is too much to ask. If civilization is decent it will not need the Church artificially to buttress it. If it is not decent it would be blasphemy for the Church to seek to preserve it.

We must not confound human destiny and contemporary civilization, with its ins and its outs, and its classes, and its settled order of things. Otherwise we may be in the foolish position of the

imaginary Bishop in one of Mr. Sitwell's poems, who fell asleep in his garden one warm afternoon. While he slept there came the Judgment Day. The Bishop woke to find the second housemaid going by in a robe of glorious iridescent silk with a crown of glory on her head. "I warned people," said the Bishop, "that the first thing we knew we'd have Bolshevism."

Let us by all means have more religion, but let it be real religion, theocentric, awed, a thing of beauty, and of deep humility. And let us not seek it for the sake of preserving civilization, that relatively unimportant incident. Let us seek it because we have lost our way, in a maze of sin and pride; because we are lonely, and life is dull, and the world's gaudy baubles seem like tinsel; because God is our lost treasure; because we would be shriven; because we are children and the Father's house is home; because we have too long been clever and self-sufficient; because worldliness is drab and stupid; because we would eat again the bread of God and drink once more the purple wine of Heaven.



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